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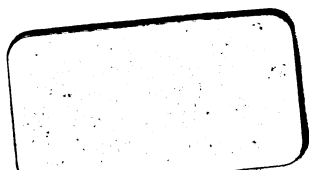
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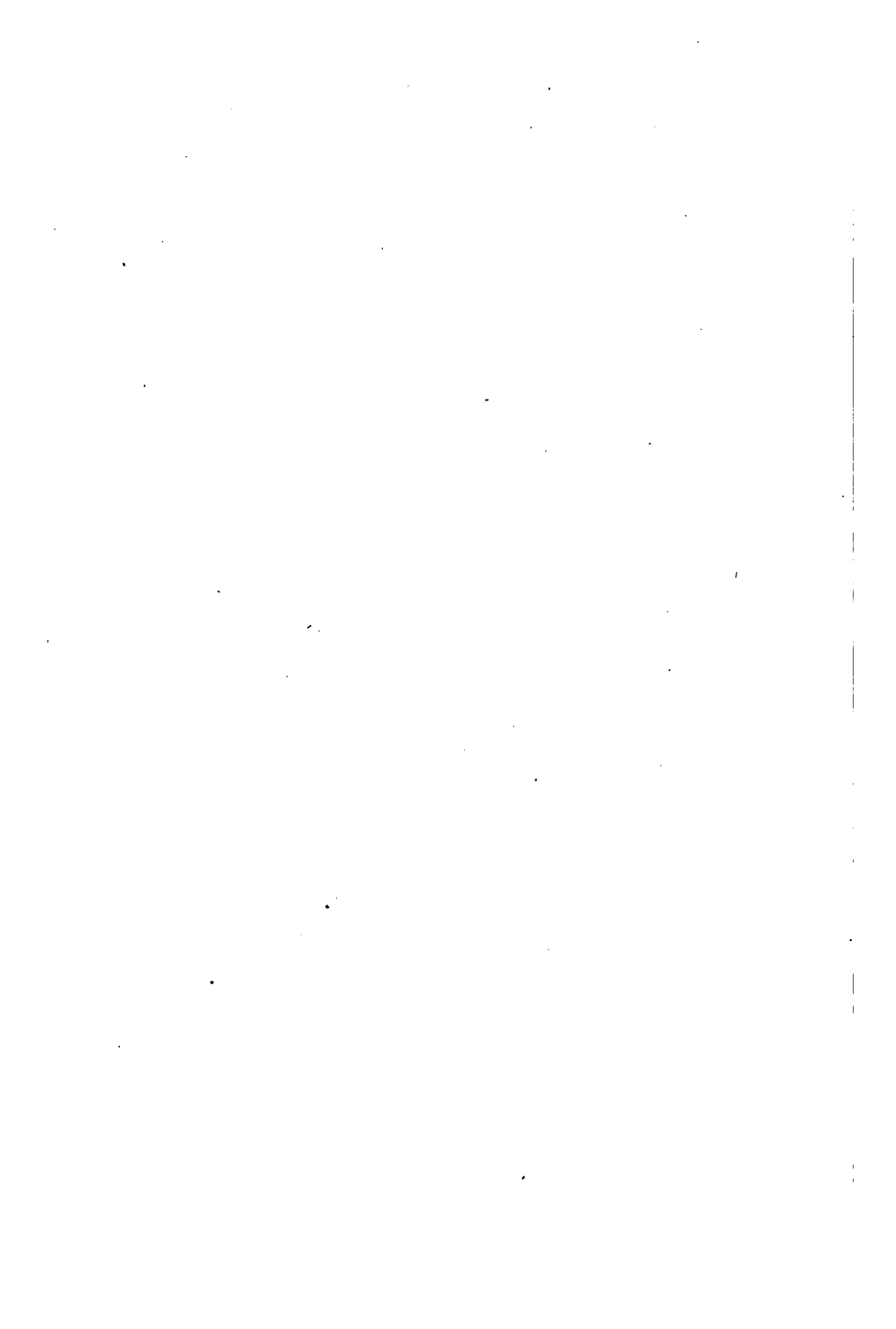
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**JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.**



# JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.

A Story, in Three Vols.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JILTED."

"No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail: for being in a ship is being in a jail with the chance of being drowned."—*Dr. Johnson.*

VOL. III.

London:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW, & SEARLE,

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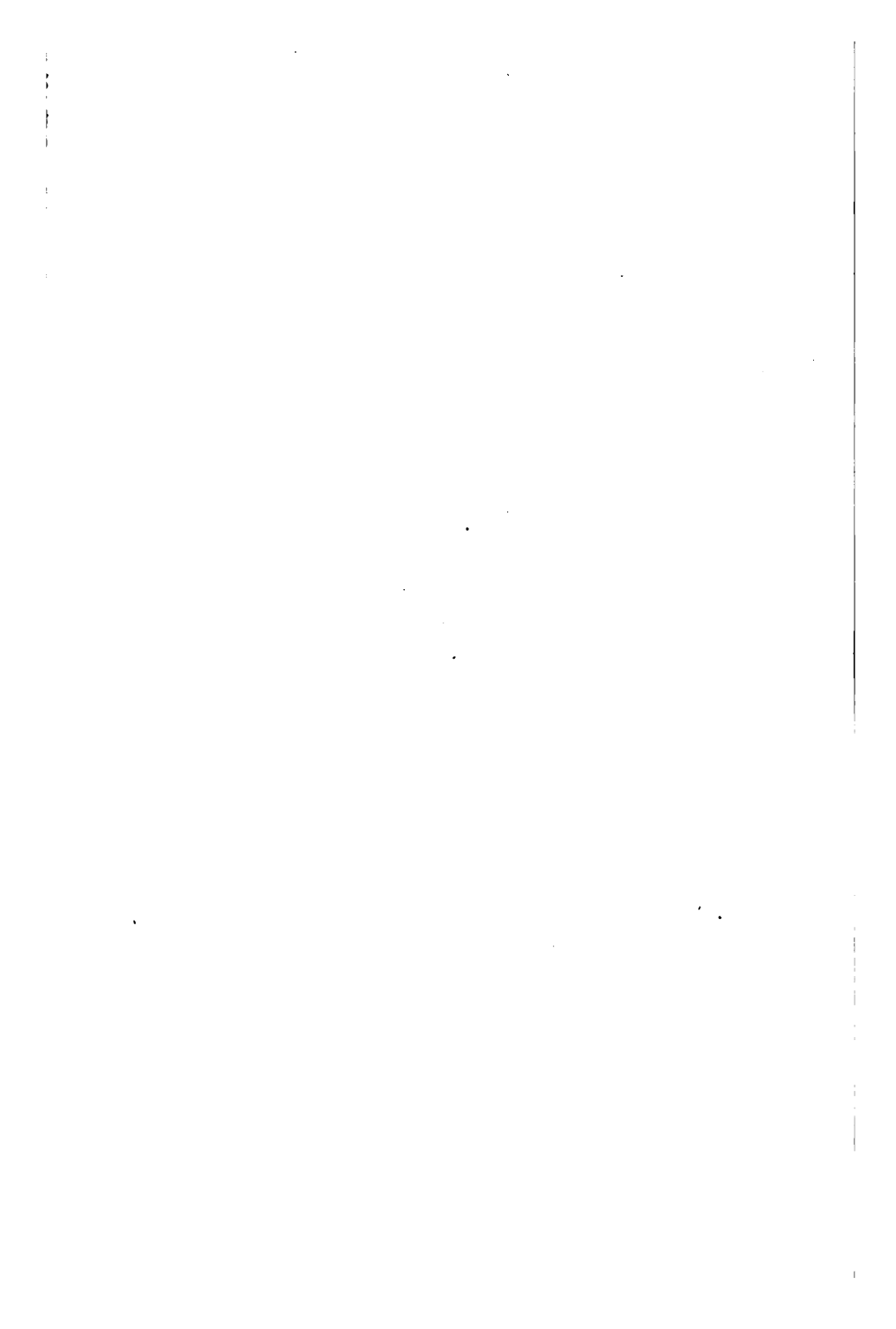
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# JOHN HOLDSWORTH: CHIEF MATE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### REFLECTIONS.

THE fowl dished up by the landlady, and served upon fine linen, was plump, and juicy and aromatic enough to re-excite the appetite of an alderman after an immense dinner at the Mansion House; but Holdsworth hardly touched it. The woman looked vexed as she removed it, for the neglect of such a dainty was as good as a spoken disparagement of her skill as a cook. She set a fine cheese, fresh from

the farmhouse over the way, upon the table, and butter from the same dairy, firm and sweet-smelling, as butter should be; but these were left untasted.

"I don't know who he may be," she whispered to her husband, outside, "but if he don't make a better dinner than this every day, it's no wonder his body's a shadder."

The setting sunshine streamed into the little parlour in which Holdsworth sat, and enriched the room with its vivid crimson light; the soft evening breeze wafted pleasant perfumes through the open window; and in the air was the tender and delightful peace which falls with an appreciable hush over little country villages, where the sinking of the sun is the signal for rest.

Holdsworth had made up his mind to

sleep in Southbourne that night. He needed the silence and the solitude the little inn promised him, that he might meditate upon the steps he should now take.

The feverish misery that had been born in him by the landlady's story was, in some measure, tranquillised, and he had now the power, at least, to think with tolerable clearness. And yet he was sorely perplexed, as he sat with his head resting on his hand and his weary eyes fixed on the little garden outside. Impulses were governing him that made his mind incline from side to side like a pendulum. Had Mr. Newcome been alive—the kind and good old rector, whom he recalled with love—he would have gone to him, avowed himself, and entreated his counsel.

He felt that Dolly was dead to him.

He felt this, though no words that he had at his command would have enabled him to explain his ideas. His own grand sense of honour witnessed this truth, that she had married another man in full belief that he — John Holdsworth — was dead ; and he recognised and appreciated the force of the overwhelming claims of the moral obligation imposed on him to leave her belief undisturbed. Why ? Because its disturbance would generate a heavy burden of shame, would make her practically false to both men, and stain her nature with a sin whose hue would not be the less dark in the sight of the world because her conscience had no share in it.

Such instinctive perception of the high needs of the seldom-paralleled situation his fate had placed him in, could only have



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possessed a man of deep honour, great humanity, and rare unselfishness.

But his child !

The child of his own passionate love for Dolly ! *There* was the magnetic power that drew all his inclinations away from the silent command of honour.

To see her—to behold himself renewed in a sweet child's face—to press his lips *once* to her cheek—once only, if never more !

Oh ! not once—not once only ! To dwell near her, to have her in his sight, to watch them both, and live out the years that should be allotted him in secret contemplation of the joy, the sacred pleasures, the divine emotions embodied in this woman and her babe ; happinesses which had been broken away from his life—could not this be ?

He started up and looked at himself in the glass over the mantel-shelf. Had suffering wrought in his face to such poor purpose, that even the eye of love could pierce through the sunken mask? His child knew him not—and Dolly, deeming him dead, and holding him a thing of the irreclaimable past, could not behold—could never imagine that she beheld—in that bowed figure, that bearded face, those hollow eyes, that hair with patches of gray all over it, the handsome, vigorous, upright, clear-eyed man whom she had called husband.

Husband ! . . . and she had left him !

Stop ! Passages of the landlady's story echoed in his ears ; how the poor young lady was starving ; how she had a tiny baby to support ; how the workhouse

seemed better to her than the hopeless, scanty produce of the needle; how she held back, reluctant to give her hand to the man who wished to marry her; how she had wept when her hand was given!

Oh, husband! oh, lover! though to the past only those titles now belong; by your own sufferings, remember hers! By your own misery, when, feeling yourself dying alone on the great deep, your physical torments yielded to the fiercer tortures of your heart when you thought of your wife praying for him, whom, you said to yourself, she shall never see again, remember her! pity her! Was his imagination so poor that he could not find it in him to make, out of the landlady's brief tale, a pregnant, bitter picture of his wife's trials? Not so! To such a heart as his, one hint of misery would bring with it many

piteous details. There was infinite anguish in the picture his fancy drew ; but he forced himself to contemplate it, that the jealousy, the disappointment, the despair of unfulfilled hope, might melt out of his heart, and leave it a fit shrine for the consecration of the two images which the uncontrollable will of his humanity as a father and a husband declared should be placed there.

His fingers had stolen over his face as he stood before the looking-glass. A long time he thus remained, while the sun went down behind the trees in the far-off fields, and the twilight stole softly into the room and made his figure visionary. When he withdrew his hands from his eyes, they were wet ; but the one star shining clearly in the dark blue overhead had dawned out of the light to witness a fairer sight

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than the sun had shone upon—a face from which all vestige of hardness and severity had passed, eyes heavy with tears upturned to God's kingdom, and lips whispering a prayer for help, for courage, for counsel, to aid the resolution of his heart, intent upon a noble self-sacrifice that should yet not remove it from the sphere of all that it held dearest on earth.

## CHAPTER II.

### HANWITCH.

HANWITCH is nowhere seen to greater advantage than from the summit of the little hill that flanks it on the west. Here, if you are an epicure in your enjoyment of what is picturesque in scenery, you will take your stand at sunset, while the splendour still flushes the heavens, and the country all around is tinted with a delicate crimson haze. In this fairy light, Hanwitch, from where you stand, will resemble some architectural dream; for the serene sky gives an ideality to the proportions

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which are magnified by the soft combining shadows, and peace broods in the streets. The noble church dedicated to St. James towers in the midst of the houses ; its spire glows with the red fire, which a little while before had bathed the whole pile and kindled brilliant stars in its long and narrow windows ; and all about the church rise and fall the roofs of closely-grouped houses, manifold in colour, with lines of thin blue smoke mounting straight into the sky. The town lies backed with wooded scenery, and the picturesque outlines of the houses take a new detail of beauty from the relief they give to the soft dark masses of trees and lightlier-coloured fields which make up the farther landscape. And as you watch, a human interest will be communicated to the town by the breaking out here and there of little yellow lights.

Darkness soon falls when the crimson flush pales upon the sky ; but where you stand daylight is still around, mellowed into deepest, richest beauty of colour, and so lingering ere it fades into the gray and gloom of twilight.

The town has been enlarged since the days to which this story belongs ; but elderly people are living whose love for the old High Street scarcely reconciles them to the "improvements" which have been made in its aspect. Surveyors and local boards press sorely upon gentle prejudices. These elderly people remember the row of antique houses where the big bank building now stands. They remember certain primitive shops, the windows of which were furnished with diamond-shaped panes of glass that discoloured to the eye the wares exposed for sale within. They remember the



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picturesque alley out of the High Street, with a cottage at the end of it that had a green porch; it looked from its cool retreat upon the narrow slice of the main thoroughfare with its passengers flitting like shadows past the brief opening. And I myself can recall the wonderful effect of light and shadow in that tranquil embrasure when the evenings lengthened, and as I beheld it once—a maid-servant, picturesquely attired in a red petticoat, lolling within the porch, her hand upon her hips, laughing at a dog that stood on its hind legs begging; the figures shadowed, the windows above burning with the light of the setting sun, the pavement a deep gray.

In Holdsworth's time, the vehicles and passengers were in perfect keeping with the venerable and faded but dignified

aspect of the old street. The townspeople still lingered behind the transition-epoch of that bygone day, and held for the most part tenaciously to the costumes and the indolence of their fathers.

The town was about an hour's walk from Southbourne. After quitting the handful of houses which formed the village, Hanwich came upon you as a metropolis. To describe it in homely guide-book fashion:—It had two good churches, and a public square full of evergreens, rock-work, and stone images; several snug inns, one wide street, and a quantity of narrow ones; a town hall, a market-place, a prison, and a town crier; a large number of old ladies and fat poodles, invalids, sedan-chairs, and camp-stools. In olden times—and now I am talking of the eighteenth century—it had held some sort of position as a

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third-rate inland watering-place; but what had become of the springs which had brought the gout, the vapours, and the spleen from places as distant as London to drink, the oldest inhabitant never could remember. But one thing was certain: there was no lack of water in the place. A river ran close to it, and from this river meandered some crystal streamlets which ran right into it. And where the river was, the scenery was exquisite in summer—cool, deep, and leafy, with a bridge at each end of the town, a little landing-stage, a punt or two, and midway between the bridges, a cluster of trees on either bank, with huge gnarled trunks and roots which ran naked for many feet along the ground, whilst, high above, their branches mingled and formed a tunnel for the water to flow under. Here the trout would leap;

here the water-rat would sneak from its earthy chamber and break the tide into thin ripples as it noiselessly made for the opposite shore; here the sunshine would fall in threads through the leaves and gild the black long-legged insects on the surface of the water.

Ten o'clock was striking when Holdsworth was driven into Hanwich by the landlord of the Southbourne inn, who was rich enough to own a horse and gig. The drive had been a very short one, and in the landlord's opinion seven-and-sixpence had never been more easily earned. The gig was stopped at the door of the "Hanwich Arms," and Holdsworth got out. Then came a porter, who nodded pleasantly to the owner of the gig, and hoisted the portmanteau on his shoulder.

“My respects to the governor, Joe. How is he?”

“Pretty middlin’! How’s yourself?”

“Why, I can’t say as I’m quite the thing. The weather’s been rayther agin my rheumatiz.—Wish you good mornin’, sir.”

And with this farewell to Holdsworth, the landlord drove himself away.

Holdsworth’s plans had been fully settled by him the night before; and one part of them was that he should put up at some inn at Hanwitch, while he made inquiries of deep interest to himself, and obtained a lodging. Having followed the porter into the bar and ordered a bed for the night, he re-entered the street.

His emotions, as he first began to walk, were conflicting and painful. He was now in the town where his wife lived; any

moment might bring them face to face, and the wildest anxiety to see her was mixed up with a sensation of shrinking fear of the encounter. He stared eagerly at the people, and now and again, when a little child passed, his heart beat rapidly, and he felt his blood leave his face. But he mastered himself soon, repeatedly murmuring, as a reassuring argument, that, were they to meet, Dolly would not know him.

He was in the main street, walking slowly, and helping his step with a stick, not more from habit than from necessity, for he was frequently seized with a weakness in the legs which would sometimes oblige him to stop, or seat himself, if a seat were at hand. His object now was to find out where Dolly lived, a question he would not ask the landlady at South-

bourne, lest, added to the inquiries he had already made, it should excite her suspicion and set her surmising.

He noticed a small chemist's shop opposite, and, his mind establishing a friendly connection between drugs and dentistry, he crossed and entered. A bald-headed man in spectacles received him with a bow.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Conway, the dentist, lives?"

The chemist, who knew perfectly well, scratched his ear and seemed to reflect. He drew teeth himself, and was not disposed to furnish a rival with a patient if he could help it.

"I know the name, sir, and——might I ask if you want anything done to your teeth."

"No, I merely wish to know where Mr. Conway lives."

“It’s not for me to speak ill of a brother practitioner, and as I shan’t mention names, no harm can be done,” said the chemist, with his eye on Holdsworth’s mouth; “but I do say that it’s a pity people should start in a business, requiring as much skill as the highest branches of surgery, without knowing the difference between an eye and a wisdom-tooth, and drinking to that degree that their hands tremble like the windows of a coach in full tear.”

“Does Mr. Conway drink?”

“I name no names,” replied the chemist, assuming an injured expression of face. “I should be sorry to take away any man’s character, not to speak of the bread out of his mouth, though there are some people not quite so particular as me in that matter, and will start lies which should make ’em afraid to go to bed. All that



I say is, that if I had a toothache and wanted to get my jaw broke and my gum tore out, I'd go to a certain person livin' not a day's walk from this shop, and ask him to look at my tooth."

Saying which he nodded vigorously, and, taking up a bottle, began to mould a piece of blue paper over the cork.

"Where does this Mr. Conway live?" inquired Holdsworth, who judged that there might be a good deal more of professional animus than truth in the chemist's observations.

"I believe," replied the chemist, sulkily vouchsafing the information which he could scarcely longer evade, "that the party you refer to lives in the Ellesmere Road. He did yesterday; but some persons in this world are so dependent on their landlords that there's no tellin'

what's going to happen to 'em to-morrow."

Thanking this very good-natured and remarkably ingenuous chemist for his direction, Holdsworth quitted the shop and walked up the street. He asked a butcher-boy the way to Ellesmere Road, and was told to keep straight on, until he came to a "Methody's Chapel, ven he'd see a turnin', vich 'ud be the road he ast for."

The Methodist Chapel was a good distance off, and as Holdsworth's pace was slow, he had plenty of leisure for reflection, which was bitter enough; for, strive as he might to waive the chemist's gossip as mere trade scandal and jealousy, his mind persisted in fastening on it, and turning it about, and coining deep anxiety out of it.

If this Mr. Conway were the drunkard

the chemist affirmed him to be, and the pauper too—for the sarcasm about “persons being dependent on their landlords” had not been lost—what kind of life was Dolly and *his* child leading? He frowned, and felt his hand tighten on the handle of his stick; but a milder persuasion grew in him, and he forced his mind away from the subject.

So bright a morning as it was would bring forth many people; and the High Street was tolerably well filled with pedestrians, and old people in bath-chairs, wheeled along the gutters for fear of the horses, and nurses dragging children by the hand, and waggons, and tradesmen’s traps. The early coach from Canterbury came thundering along the street, the guard blowing his horn and causing house-windows to fly open, and heads to protrude,

and a handkerchief, or, maybe, a duster here and there, to be waved in coy recognition of the hand-kissing of certain spruce and finely-attired gentlemen on the top of the vehicle.

But, varied and cheerful as the scene was, Holdsworth had no eyes but for the women and children he met, at whom he darted quick eager glances, which must have sent some of the women tripping along with a sincere conviction that they had met with one admirer, at all events, that morning.

He passed the market-place with its stalls loaded with garden produce, and clean little shops submitting a tempting array of plump fowls, geese, sides of bacon, legs of pork, and strings of sausages; and in about twenty minutes' time reached the Methodist Chapel, and turned into the Ellesmere Road.

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A short broad road, with the sun-lighted country beyond ; on either side, small newly-built villas, with now and again a house presenting a more venerable aspect. There was grass in the roadway, and one or two of the villas had placards in their windows. In the front garden of one of the nearer houses an old gentleman, with an inflamed face, and a white handkerchief over his head, was plying a rake. No other person was visible ; but, when Holdsworth had advanced a few steps, a woman came out of a gate and approached him. His heart came into his throat, and he stood stock still. She drew near, but she was not Dolly. She glanced at him as she passed, struck, maybe, by his pale face, and the singular mixture of old age and youth which his appearance and figure suggested.

He breathed deeply and walked forward, glancing to right and left of him.

The last house but one on the left was the house he wanted. A brass plate inscribed with Conway's name and calling was fixed to the iron railings, and over the door was a lamp furnished with blue and red glass. .

Holdsworth dared scarcely glance at it. When his eye encountered the name he turned cold, and felt the damp perspiration suffusing his forehead.

He came back hurriedly, with the bare impression on his mind of a small house with the upper blinds drawn, and with an untended garden in the front.

He returned to the main entrance of the road, stopped, looked back, and then slowly retraced his steps.

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There was a house of an older fashion than any of the others on the right-hand side, about midway ; one that had evidently taken root there many years before the little villas had gathered themselves together to intercept its view and violate its pastoral solitude. Its doorway was sheltered by a roomy porch, with creepers clambering up its trellised supporters ; its darkling windows had the burnished glitter upon them that is peculiar to old glass ; its eaves were capacious enough to accommodate a whole colony of swallows, and it had a fair piece of ground stretching away at its back. The bright brass knocker on the green door, the white doorsteps, the purity of the window glass, and the spotlessness of the window drapery, afforded an excellent guarantee of the housewifely qualities of the inmates. In one of the

windows hung a card. Holdsworth opened the gate and knocked.

"I should like to see your apartments," he said to the cheerful-faced, middle-aged woman who had promptly replied to his summons.

"Certainly, sir ; please to walk in."

She threw open the door of a long sitting - room, smelling of lavender and mignonette, and furnished with worked chairs, old china, a tall wooden clock with a febrile tick, a hearth-rug decorated with blue and yellow roses in wool, and a sour squeezed - looking bookcase which seemed to hold sundry folios under protest, and to threaten the instant ejection of a number of small books on the top shelves, which leaned one against another, some of them gaping apparently in the last extremity of terror.



“For yourself, sir? Or might there be children?”

“For myself.”

“Why, then, sir,” exclaimed the woman, with great alacrity, “I think I can accommodate you. You can have this room, and a bed-room just over it, and the use of the pianner in the next room when you see company, for fourteen shillings a week.”

“That will do,” said Holdsworth.

The woman smiling like clockwork, proceeded to inform him that she was a widow, and had nobody else in the house but her mother, who was very aged and silly-like, and only left her room, which was upstairs, once a week for a turn in the garden; that anything more peaceful than her house was never known, and that if the gentleman was studious, he would never be interrupted with noises.

She then led him upstairs to the bedroom, which was as comfortable as any man could wish.

On their return to the sitting-room, Holdsworth, who was tired, asked permission to rest himself, and sat down near the window which overlooked the road, where he could just obtain a glimpse of Mr. Conway's house.

He broke away from the overpowering thoughts which the sense of the near presence of his wife and child forced upon him, and steadying his voice, turned to the woman who stood at the door, and asked her if she knew any of the people living around.

"Why, sir, I know most of my neighbours by name, though I can't say as e'er a one of 'em are friends of mine."

"I noticed a dentist's house just now,

over the way. What sort of business can he do in such a road as this?"

"Oh, you're speaking of Mr. Conway!" she exclaimed, with a shake of the head. "It's his own fault if he don't do a good business, for I hear that he's pretty clever at making teeth and drawing of them, and the likes of that; but he don't seem to have no patients, and I know why; but it's not for me to meddle in other folks' concerns."

"Why?"

"I suppose you're no friend of his, sir?" she said.

"I never saw the gentleman in my life."

"Well, then, to speak plainly, he drinks; and it's pretty well known; and so there's no wonder gentlefolks won't go near him."

Holdsworth forced a look of unconcern into his face as he asked :

“Is he married?”

“Oh yes, sir ; and a sweet dear creature his wife is ; Mrs. Holdsworth as was. Hers is a sad history. She lived at a place called Southbourne — maybe you know it—it’s an hour’s walk from here ; and I was told her story by Mrs. Campion, as used to keep a greengrocer’s shop in that village, and served most of the gentry about. She—I’m speakin’ of Mrs. Conway —lost her husband at sea, and married the present gentleman two or three years afterwards. , Mrs. Campion said she was driven to it by want o’ the bare necessities of life,” added the woman in a subdued voice.

Holdsworth was silent.

“I don’t think,” continued the woman,

“that she leads a very happy life. We sometimes has a chat together when we meet out o’ doors, and she’s the civilest, sweetest young thing I ever knew. But,” she exclaimed, catching herself up, “all this is no business of mine ; and I hope, sir, you’ll think none the worse of me for gossiping about strangers’ affairs. I was strivin’ to answer your questions, sir.”

“Thank you,” said Holdsworth, rising, but keeping his back to the window. “Can you receive me to-morrow ?”

“Oh yes, sir ; at any time you’re pleased to come.”

“My name is Hampden. I shall sleep to-night at the ‘Hanwitch Arms.’ Here are a couple of sovereigns, which will serve you as a security for my taking your rooms. I leave myself in your hands, and have no doubt I shall be comfortable.”

The woman took the money with a courtesy, thinking to herself that she had never met with a more polite and considerate gentleman. Hollisworth left the house. He cast a swift glance at the villa with the plate upon the railing, and then hurried towards the town.

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## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE ELLESMERE ROAD.

HOLDSWORTH spent the greater part of the evening in writing a letter to Mr. Sherman. At twelve o'clock next day he was an inmate of Mrs. Parrot's house in the Ellesmere Road.

In his walk to the lodgings he had met only strange faces, one or two of which looked after him, struck, perhaps, by his keen fugitive glance, his slow pace that stole along the ground, and his depressed head, as though there were a shame in his heart that made the daylight painful.

Mrs. Parrot fussed about him for some time, and tired him with an account of the articles she had purchased for him. Her memory was slow, and her capacity of reckoning very indifferent ; hence it took her twenty minutes to account for the expenditure of twelve shillings. Happily, it was her mother's day for walking in the garden, and Holdsworth could see the old lady—a mere wisp of a figure, in ancient black satin reaching to her ankles and clinging to her legs, a nose like the Duke of Wellington's, and a chin like Punch's—hobbling along a gravel walk, looking with afflicting agitation around her, and coughing like a rattle, as a signal to her daughter, who, when she had done with her accounts, hurried out.

The control Holdsworth had kept upon himself, while Mrs. Parrot remained in the



room, he could now put aside ; indeed, the suffering caused him by his pent-up agitation imperatively demanded that the emotion should have play. Now he would walk hastily to and fro the room, and then fling himself into a chair, clasping his hands tightly, and then rise and stand before the window and send glances passionate and shrinking at the house occupied by the Conways.

Now that he was close to his wife, now that any moment might reveal her walking past his window with his child, perchance at her side, he dreaded lest the unparalleled situation he had forced himself into would prove too heavily charged with cruel conditions for him to bear. Never once then, never once afterwards, did the vaguest impulse possess him to go forth and declare himself and claim her. No ! A sense of

honour that was inexorable, since it prohibited the faintest echo of the soul's secret passionate yearning to make itself audible, had decreed his silence and enforced the obedience of inclination.

The only concession granted was the enjoyment of such ghostly and barren pleasure as his heart could find in the knowledge of the close neighbourhood of the two who were so dear to him. Oh! bitter waking of memory, to recall him from the sunny vision of the old times when his joy was complete, and love a permanent possession to enrich his nature with all gracious and generous emotions, to thrust him into the gray and bleak twilight of a loveless and desolate life, which the recovered power could only embitter by recurrence to the things that were lost!

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His eyes wandered ceaselessly and restlessly towards the window. From time to time people went by with the slow, aimless steps of persons who walk for no other end than exercise. An old gentleman, with a white moustache and a dark skin, stopped, with another old gentleman, in high shirt-collars and a tail-coat, opposite Holdsworth's window, and argued, with many galvanic flourishes of the arms and grimaces of the face. There was much political excitement abroad at that time, owing to the Reform Bill of the Grey Administration, to which the royal assent had been given ; and the dark-skinned old gentleman—whose age, warmth, and intemperate flourishes were as demonstrative of his politics as his language—bade his companion take notice that, before five years were passed, England would be a

tenth-rate power, governed by a mob, with a Jesuit seated on every hearth, a Nuncio preaching at St. Paul's, not a Bible to be found in the country, and the gallows groaning under strings of honest patriots. The old gentleman in the high shirt-collars, who clearly shared his friend's opinions, nodded savagely, asked with his shoulders, "What would you have?" and then moved on a dozen paces, to be stopped again by the other old gentleman with prophecies, maybe, more blood-chilling and awful than those he had already declaimed.

Presently Holdsworth, scarcely conscious of what he was about, left the window and approached the bookcase. He pulled out a volume, which proved to be an old copy of *Gulliver's Travels*, "adorn'd with sculptures;" and his eye lighting on that passage in which Gulliver closes his account

of his second voyage,\* his thoughts trooped off to his old seafaring life, the book closed upon his fingers, and he sank in deep meditation.

The restoration of his memory was comparatively so recent, that he had found no leisure to recall those frightful experiences of his which could not recur without overwhelming him with an unspeakable horror of the sea. He now understood that it should have been his duty to call upon the owners of the "Meteor," and acquaint them with the circumstances of the wreck of their vessel, and the deaths of the persons who were in his boat, all

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\* "In a little time I and my family and friends came to a right understanding: but my wife protested 'I should never go to sea any more;' although my evil destiny so ordered, that she had not the power to hinder me."

whom he clearly remembered. There were friends, doubtless, both in England and America, who could wish to receive tidings of the fate of these people, though the long interval of five years should tell as plain a story as Holdsworth could relate. He knew not whether the inmates of the other boats had been saved, and he would have given much to ascertain this; but he understood that any communication he made to the shipowners would be almost sure to appear in print, by which his wife would learn that he was alive. "No! let the world think me dead!" he exclaimed bitterly. He had only to live for the past now—for that memory which had betrayed him and ruined his life. His future was bare and barren, and there was nothing in all the world that could kindle one ray of comfort in his hopeless heart

but the bleak privilege of dwelling near his wife and child.

He restored the book to its place and returned to the window.

In the roadway, a few yards to the right, a little girl was standing, holding a doll. She was a very little creature, with bright yellow hair down her back, and she held the doll in motherly fashion on her arm, and caressed it with her hand.

Her back was towards Holdsworth, whose eyes were rooted upon her.

She turned presently and looked down the road, and Holdsworth saw a little face upon which God had graven a sign that made the poor father clutch at the wall to steady himself. For there was his own face in miniature—the face that Dolly had loved before the sufferings of

the mind, and the anguish of hunger and thirst, had twisted from it all resemblance it had ever borne to what was manly and beautiful in the human countenance.

He pressed his hands to his eyes and gazed again, then ran to the bell-rope and pulled it. But when he had done this he wished it undone. For would not his agitation excite Mrs. Parrot's suspicions? What was there in a stranger's child that should so interest him?

He bit his lip and controlled himself with desperate will; and, when Mrs. Parrot opened the door, he said to her, in a steady voice and with a forced smile:

"I am sorry to trouble you. I am very fond of little children. Pray can you tell me who that child is, there?"

Mrs. Parrot drew to the window, evi-



dently finding nothing odd in the question, and said :

“Why, that’s little Nelly Holdsworth, Mrs. Conway’s daughter.”

“Ah !” exclaimed Holdsworth.

“She is a dear !” continued Mrs. Parrot. “I am very fond of that child, Mr. Hampden. She’s the only child i’ the road I allow to come into my garden, for children are so wilful, there’s no tellin’ what they’ll do the moment your eyes are off ’em. See what a little lady she looks, and how prettily she holds her doll ! She’s waiting for her mamma, I suppose.”

Mrs. Parrot rapped with her nails on the window. The child looked round, and Holdsworth shrank away. Mrs. Parrot beckoned. Holdsworth would have stopped her, but could find no words.

“She’s coming, Mr. Hampden. I’ll

bring her to you, sir, if you'll wait a moment."

And out she went.

In a few seconds she returned, leading by the hand the child, who hung back when she caught sight of the white-faced, bearded man.

"There, Mr. Hampden, this is my pretty young friend, little Nelly!" exclaimed Mrs. Parrot, stooping to give the child a kiss. "Go and shake hands with the gentleman, my dear, and show him your nice doll. I'll tell you when I see your mamma."

"Come, dear, come to me," said Holdsworth in a low voice.

The child approached him slowly, stopping now and again, and looking shyly at Mrs. Parrot.

"Tut ! tut !" exclaimed that lady. "What are you afraid of, Miss Nelly?"

Go and shake hands with the gentleman, like a little lady."

Holdsworth put out his hand ; the child advanced a step nearer ; he fell upon one knee and drew her to him.

For some moments he could not speak ; he could only look at her—look with eyes of all devouring love, absorbing all the sweetness of that young face, feeling a pang of exquisite joy, but shivering quickly as his fingers locked themselves upon her tiny hand.

He longed to press the little creature to his heart, to fasten his lips upon her mouth, to weep over her.

"Tell me your name, little one !"

"Nelly," replied the child, keeping at arm's length from him, and staring into his face.

"Nelly what ?"

“Nelly Ho’dwor’t.”

His own name, thus lisped by her, thrilled through him ; he caught his breath, and said :

“May I kiss you ?”

She put up her mouth and he kissed her.

“How pretty your hair is !” he murmured, in a voice of exquisite tenderness, which made Mrs. Parrot turn suddenly and look at him. He met her glance with a smile, and said :

“I am very fond of children. Will this little girl come and see me here sometimes ?”

“Ay, that she will, sir. Won’t you, Nelly ?”

“Det.”

“How old are you, Nelly ?”

“Four.”

“Who gave you that doll ?”

“Mamma.”

“You will bring dolly to see me, and we will have tea, all three of us. What have I got here? A bright shilling! That will buy dolly a parasol!”

No words can describe the tone his voice took as he spoke.

“What do you say to the gentleman for this beautiful present?” cried Mrs. Parrot.

“Tanks,” said the child, putting the doll on the floor to examine the money with both hands.

“Oh, here comes your mamma!” said Mrs. Parrot. “Make your reverence to the gentleman . . . there’s a dear; pick up dolly . . . that’s right.”

She took Nelly’s hand and ran with her out of the room.

The mother, standing at her gate on the

other side of the road, looking up and down the road, caught sight of Mrs. Parrot and the child, and crossed over to them.

They remained opposite Holdsworth's window talking, while he, shrinking against the wall, peered at them through the muslin curtain.

The five years which had passed since he had seen his wife had worked but a very little change in her. There was more womanly fulness in her form; and this was about all those five years had done for her. Her face was still as youthful as when Holdsworth had last looked on it, her eyes still possessed their deep and delicate tint, the hair its richness and lustre, the mouth its sweetness, the whole face that almost infantine expression, conveyed by soft shadowy lines and the archness of the pencilled eyebrows, which

made it beautiful in repose, more beautiful yet in sorrow. But, young and fair as she seemed, there was a deep-rooted care in her face which, without qualifying its freshness, yet mingled in her smile, and lived in her eyes, and fixed a wistful look on her, such as would be seen in one who lingers long, long waiting for the summons to depart which no day brings. Her dress was shabby, her gloves old ; but her beauty made even her faded apparel, cut after the unbecoming fashion then in vogue, picturesque. She wore a white crape handkerchief over her bare shoulders, and a bonnet-shaped hat, ornamented with a dark feather, which, drooping over her back, imparted a peculiar vividness to the light, sheeny gold of her hair.

Strained as his ears were, Holdsworth could not hear her voice, though Mrs.

Parrot's kindly cackle was audible enough. It was manifest that they exchanged mere commonplace civilities; and presently Mrs. Parrot dropped a courtesy, and the mother and child walked slowly away.

Holdsworth watched them with just such a look in his eyes as had been in them when, racked with torture in the open boat, he had cast glances full of passionate despair round the horizon for the ship that was to rescue him. He saw the little girl hold up her shilling, whereupon the mother stopped and looked back, then continued her walk and passed out of sight.



## CHAPTER IV.

### OVER THE WAY.

It was natural, after the first liveliness of the emotion which had been excited in Mrs. Parrot's breast, by the installation of a lodger worth fourteen shillings a week to her, had in some degree subsided, that she should begin to wonder who that lodger was.

She had been particularly struck and greatly taken by his behaviour to the little girl, and inferred, of course, that he was a humane and tender-hearted man, a conjecture which, although it was true, did

no credit to her sagacity, considering the circumstance on which it was based ; since it is a notorious fact, that great rascals will admire, pet, and “tip” little children, whose parents they would not scruple to rob of their very last farthing.

But though Mrs. Parrot had no doubt as to her lodger’s humanity of character after what she had seen, she could not by any means feel so sure as to the position he held either in or out of society, the calling he had followed, if ever he *had* followed a calling, or the part of the world he came from. His name was Hampden. That was English. But had he a Christian name ? No initial stood between the Mr. and the Hampden, on the card affixed to his portmanteau. *Was* he a Christian ? She hoped he was. She was no judge of other religions ; but she must say, when

she let her lodgings to people, that she liked to *feel* that they were Christians.

He had ordered dinner at two o'clock ; and when she came in to lay the cloth, for she kept no servant, she found him still at the window, staring into the empty road as earnestly as if it were filled with a very beautiful and novel procession. But she could only suppose that he looked out of the window because he was new to the place.

He smiled softly when he met her glance, but did not speak, nor would she hazard any remarks herself, for fear of being thought intrusive. All that he said during dinner was to express himself well pleased with her cooking ; but she noticed, in removing the dishes, that, pleasantly as he had praised the piece of roast mutton, he had scarcely tasted it, and that of the four

potatoes she had put into the dish, three and a half remained.

Whilst in the kitchen she heard him leave the house, and, when her task was done, she went upstairs to her mother's room, whither she had conducted the old lady soon after little Nelly's visit.

"If the gentleman don't eat more every day than he's just had for dinner," said she, throwing herself back in a chair and fanning her hot face with the corner of her apron, "I reckon we shall have a funeral here before long."

"A what!" gasped the old woman, who sat upright in a cane chair, near the open window, with an immense Bible on her right hand and her spectacles on the top of it.

"He's no more than skin an' bone as he is," continued Mrs. Parrot, "but it

was a picter to see him with the child. I never see a man more soft with a child before."

"He ain't likely to make strange nises o' nights, is he, Sairey!" exclaimed the old woman, earnestly regarding her daughter with a pair of eyes from which all expression and light seemed literally washed out, leaving nothing but two circles of weak, dim blue.

"I don't think so. He seems to me quiet enough. He's fond o' staring into the road. One might think he's trying to find out where he is. I niver see a stranger face. He don't look English-like, and yet he talks uncommon well. I can tell by his boots—which is square as square at the toes, and his clothes, which have an odd twist somehows—that he's not from these parts. Maybe, he's from Ireland."

"I hope not, Sairey," ejaculated the old woman, bending forward with the profoundly confidential air of old age. "I was once fellow-sarvint with a Ayrish futman as was allus talkin' of burnin' down houses, an' his speech ran on so it were niver to be trusted, for niver was such lies as he used to tell. You'd best gi' him notice, Sairey. You can say I gi' yer more trouble nor you can well get through, and recommind Burton's lodgin's to him. Burton's a strong man, and kapes dogs."

"Tut! I'm not afeard!" said Mrs. Parrot, tossing up her hands and giving her cap a pull. "There's no more harm in the man than there is in you, for didn't I tell yer how he give the girl a shillin' and spoke that soft to it, it made me feel as if I could ha' cried. Give him notice,

and him not here a day yit? Fourteen shillin' is fourteen shillin' in these scarce times, to say nothin' of his being as well-spoken a man as iver you listened to in your life; an' as for his face, it is but as God made it, an' beauty is but skin deep, as t' parson says, an' I'm for lettin' well alone."

"If he ain't Ayrish," said the old woman, stroking the back of her lean hand, "he may be very well. But sich talk of invasions from that nashun as I used to hear when I was a gal, an' the drink an' shootin' as goes on there, is enough to wet your hair with perspiration . . . "

"I didn't say he was Irish. I don't know what he is. He was askin' about Mrs. Conway, though she's unbeknown to him, as anyone might tell who heerd him questionin'. He wants Miss Nelly to bear

him company at tea, and I don't see why the child can't come, if the mother 'ull let it. I won't take it upon myself to bring the child in. I'll speak to the mother when I see her. I like Mrs. Conway. She's a nice-spoken lady, but seems to know a deal of grief, poor thing. It 'ud be a mussy if that husband of hers 'ud take it into his head to pull out all his own teeth. The cook at Mrs. Short's was tellin' me he's grown that wicious there's no wishin' him a civil good mornin'. An' drink! Didn't I see him pass here yesterday evenin', staggerin' on his legs like a doll which a child tries to teach walkin' to?"

"The 'pothecaries used to draw teeth in my day; now they must be all gentle-folks as looks into your mouth," said the old woman, who had been three minutes



searching in her pocket for the snuff-box that lay open, with some of its sand-coloured contents spilt, in her lap.

“Pretty gentlefolks!” exclaimed Mrs. Parrot, pulling up the old woman’s dress and tilting the spilt snuff into the box. “If they’re all like Mr. Conway, I’d rather carry a toothache to my grave than have it stopped wi’ the lockjaw, which they tell me he gave to Mr. Timpson; for drink had taken away the use of his mind, and he pushed the wrong instrayment into the man’s mouth and nearly choked him, he did, and then took out two wrong teeth after all; beautiful teeth they wos, for Mr. Timpson showed them to me hisself, with the tears standin’ in his eyes, wropped up in silver paper.”

“Thank God! he can’t draw none o’ my teeth!” mumbled the old woman, talking

through her nose in wrapt enjoyment of the flavour of the snuff. "They're all gone."

"I noticed Mrs. Conway's gownd to-day. If I was her husband, I'd scorn to let her appear in sitch a rag. And there was darns in the knees o' that child's stockings as made 'em look forty year old. They're always i' the same dresses, both of 'em. There's a silk she puts on o' Sundays, all wore thin over the buzzum, and I remember the bonnet she had on to-day iver since I've known her. Sitch a pretty face as she has, too! I expect he must ha' told her some fine lies to get her to marry him. They say he niver did well, even when he was in the High Street, wi' that show-box of his stuck up, filled wi' gaping gums an' naked teeth as turned the stomach to see. He must ha' sold that piece of

ugliness, for I don't see it nowheres outside his house, which is a mussy, for I'd as lief see a skiliton on a pole for a sign! Fancy a doctor settin' up a death's-head to show his trade?"

She jumped from her chair with a face and gesture of disgust, and throwing some knitting with the pins through it into her mother's lap, adjusted her cap before the glass, and left the room.

There is always some truth in gossip: and there was a great deal in what Mrs. Parrot had said of Mr. Conway, who, as we have seen, held no place at all in her opinion. But then sympathy for Dolly was to be expected from a woman who, if she did not know what it was to live with a drunkard, had known what it was to live with a surly man, whose eye was

evil, and whose voice was thick, and whose characteristic method of expressing discontent was by holding his clenched fist under his wife's nose.

Mr. Conway is passing Mrs. Parrot's door at the very moment that Mrs. Parrot is leaving her mother's bedroom; we shall not have an opportunity of seeing much of him, having the fortunes of a better kind of hero to deal with; so, while Holdsworth is away from his lodgings, we'll step into the road and have a look at the dentist, and follow him into his house.

He is a man with sandy whiskers and light hair, but by no means ill-looking. On the contrary, there are materials in his face out of which a very pleasing countenance could be made; a well-shaped nose, a well-shaped forehead, a good chin,

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a facial outline clearly defined and perfectly symmetrical.

But there never was a better illustration than this man's face of the truth, that good features make but a very small portion of beauty.

I want a word to express that middle quality of aspect which is contrived by the mingling of comely lineaments with bad passions. Possibly the effect is no more than a neutralisation of nature's good intentions, wherein we behold a handsome countenance sunk into a species of physical negation, by moral qualities tugging it hard in the direction of repellent ugliness.

A most unstriking face at which you would barely glance, and pass on absolutely unimpressed. His thin lips might mark both cruelty and selfishness ; his eyes are made heavy by their drooping lids, and

the irids are pale and unintelligent. He is dressed in the style of the times, of course; pantaloons strapped over his boots, a frock-coat gaping in a circle round a great quantity of black satin stock (in which are two pins and a chain). But the pantaloons are frayed at the heels and bagged at the knees; and the coat is suspiciously polished at the elbows and the rim of the collar. He walks with a quick, uneasy step; his hat slightly cocked, and his hands in his breeches pockets, and arriving at the gate of his house, opens it by giving it a kick with his foot.

He entered the sitting-room with his hat on, and found the cloth laid for dinner, but nobody in the room, which was a soiled and dingy apartment, although the house was a new one, and the paper fresh and the ceiling white. But no paper and

whitewash could qualify the sordid suggestions of the old drugget imperfectly nailed over the floor, the old leather sofa and the old leather arm-chair, the mantel-piece decorated by a pair of plated candlesticks marked with indents, the dingy red curtains, the *papier mâché* table in the window, with the mother-of-pearl dropping out of it.

The subtle magic of feminine fingers which extracts from rubbish itself what hidden capabilities it may possess of comforting the eye with some faintest aspect of taste, seemed either never to have been exercised upon this room, or to have found itself powerless to deal with it. The only feminine sign was a small bundle of child's stockings on the top of an old work-basket on the sofa.

Mr. Conway put his head out of

the door and called, "Are you there, wife?"

"Yes," replied Dolly's voice from downstairs.

"How long will dinner be?"

"Five minutes!"

He threw his hat down and walked into the "surgery," a room at the end of the passage, furnished with a chest of drawers, a toilet-table and a looking-glass, an arm-chair, an ugly circular box with a basin let into it, standing beside the arm-chair; on the toilet-table, some small hand-glasses, a pair of forceps, and three unfinished false teeth. Through the window was to be seen a slip of garden of the breadth of the house, and about fifty feet long, its neglected state, its few pinning shrubs, and a flag-pole with a vane a-top that croaked to every passage of the



wind, showing up very squalidly against the neighbouring garden, which was richly stocked with wall-fruit and ferns and green plants.

Little Nelly was in this piece of ground with her doll, seated on the grass, and at that moment making such a picture as a painter would stop to study and receive into his mind; her round dark-blue eyes following the swallows which chased each other high in the air, her mouth pouted into an expression of exquisite infantine wonder, her bright hair about her shoulders and looking, as the breeze stirred the sunshine upon it, like a falling shower of fine gold.

Mr. Conway stared at the child for a moment, and then turned away and sauntered towards the door, but came back to open one of the drawers in the chest

and extract a leather-covered bottle, which he shook at his ear, and put to his mouth.

Oh God ! what contrasts there are in life, lying so close together that the devil might measure the space between with outstretched hands ! Look at Purity and Innocence in the garden, with its eyes raised to heaven ; and the skulking fellow in the dingy room swallowing brandy as a man steals money ; and in the room below — a darksome, scantily-furnished kitchen—a sweet-faced woman doing servant's work, and urging the slattern by her side into quicker movements, that the gentleman upstairs shall have no occasion to use bad language.

She comes upstairs presently, this Dolly, her face flushed and breathing quickly from the hurry of her movements, and bears with her own hands a dish that will furnish but a poor repast, though she has done her best

to make what little there is palatable. The slattern, with wisps of red hair about her forehead and loose shoes, which beat a double knock at each step upon the uncarpeted staircase, follows, armed with a jug and a loaf of bread. Behind comes little Nelly, whom the mother has summoned before leaving the kitchen, and who has climbed the staircase with more labour than Mont Blanc is scaled by the Alpine tourist.

No word is spoken. Nelly is lifted into a chair by her mother, and Mr. Conway seats himself before the dish and fills a glass from the jug of ale, taking care—a true connoisseur in such matters—to let the liquor fall from a height, to secure a froth, into which he dips his mouth and nose.

The slattern leaves the room; and Dolly cuts up some meat and bread for the little

one, with a whisper in her ear to say grace.

"Did you get the money, Robert?" she asks presently, eating little herself, and noticing how Robert bribes his appetite with sups of ale.

"No. Davis was out."

"What shall we do? I have only five and threepence left, and this meat is not paid for."

Pence make a sordid enumeration; but, we talk of pence, reader, when we have only pence to spend.

"We must sell something, that's all," says Mr. Conway, with a kind of defiant recklessness in his manner.

She gives him a quick glance, looks at her child, and then closes the knife and fork upon her plate.

He does not notice that she has eaten

about as much as would serve a bird for a meal ; neither does he appear to remark that she drinks water. *He*, at all events, keeps the beer-jug at his elbow, from which, in a very short time, he pours out the last glass.

The child alone continues eating.

“*I* don’t know what’s to be done !” he exclaims in a voice of suppressed anger, pushing his chair from the table. “The people have dropped me for that French quack, in Mornington Street. I saw three carriages at his door when I passed just now. I ought never to have left the old shop. I did well there.”

“You would do well here if you gave yourself a chance,” says Dolly. “The lady who called yesterday evening came again this morning. Martha told me she looked annoyed when she heard you were

out. She will go to someone else, I suppose, now."

"Let her!" he calls out. "How am I to know that people are coming to me after dark? Week after week passes, and they don't come, and—am I going to hang about here a whole night, in the hope of a patient turning up? Why didn't she leave word at what hour she meant to call to-day? I went out to collect some money, and you know it, though I can guess what is in your thoughts. But it's false—there's my hand on it!"

He let his hand fall heavily on the table, and stared at his wife. She slightly turned from him, and looked through the window. He left the table and began to pace the room. The child, having emptied her plate and wanting something to play with, had taken the shilling Holdsworth

had given her from her pocket, and tried to make it spin on the cloth.

"What's that Nelly has got there?" said Mr. Conway.

"A shilling," answered Dolly.

"Did you give it her? . . . Look at our dinner! . . . You would pamper that child if we were starving. Talk to me of your five and threepence when you can give your baby a shilling!"

"I did not give it to her."

"Who, then?"

"A gentleman."

"What gentleman?"

"A gentleman lodging at Mrs. Parrot's."

He looked at her with irritable suspicion, and then said :

"Did you see him give it? Did he take you and the child for beggars? . . .

Confound his impudence ! . . . Send Martha over to him with it."

He turned to ring the bell.

"Stop!" said Dolly, quietly. "Nelly tells me that Mrs. Parrot tapped on the window to speak to her, and when she went in, she saw the gentleman, who kissed her, and gave her the shilling to buy her doll a parasol. No insult could have been intended by this."

"Oh, that was it!" exclaimed Mr. Conway. "Well, and why do you let the child keep the money? She'll lose it. Take it from her."

"It belongs to her. She will not lose it."

"Yes, she will. Nelly, give that money to your mamma."

But Nelly doubled her fist over it, and hid her hand under the table.



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“Do you hear what I say?” cried Mr. Conway.

“Why will you not let her keep it?” asked Dolly.

“Am I master here or not?” shouted Mr. Conway. “Give that money to your mother, child!”

Nelly began to whimper, terrified by the man’s voice, but loath to surrender her little treasure. He stepped up to her, whipped the little hand from under the cloth, and forcing the shilling from it, put it into his pocket.

“Though I’m a beggar by my own folly,” he exclaimed, walking to the door, “I’ll not be insulted and defied by the beggars I have brought about me.”

His fingers were in his pocket, and it seemed as though he would pull the money out and fling it on the table. But second

thoughts prevailed; he jerked his hat on his head, and marched out of the house, banging the door after him.

Dolly watched to see if he would step across to Mrs. Parrot's; but he walked straight on.

"Hush, my darling, hush!" she exclaimed, catching up the sobbing child. "Dolly shall have her parasol; I will buy it myself. Hush, my pet! Nelly's tears break poor mamma's heart. . . . Oh, John! oh, husband!" she murmured; "why did God take you from me? Why did He lead me and my little one into this misery?"

Truly, it was misery, of a forlorn and hopeless kind. But you have seen the man Dolly had married at his worst. The most brutal husband is not always brutal. The drunkard is not always drunk. More

colours than black and white go to the painting of a man off the stage, where corked eyebrows strike no horror, and blood-boltered cheeks prove nothing more than a neglect of soap.

Mr. Conway had his soft hours, when he would shed tears, smite his breast, and call himself a fiend—having reference, by this flattering title, to nothing but his behaviour to Dolly.

He was undoubtedly in love with her when he married her; and the sweet face which had made him haunt Southbourne, to the neglect of his patients, would still, even after two years, have too much potency not to occasionally soften and give movement to the humanities which lay in him, hardened and drowned in drink. Though he had always, as long as people could remember him in Hanwitch, been what

they called a dissipated man, he had managed somehow or other to get a living, to keep his landlord civil and wear good clothes. Ladies were not wanting who called him handsome. His manner, when sober, was courteous; his language correct; his fingers dexterous in pulling teeth out or putting teeth in. Those who knew anything of him knew that he never saved a penny; that were he to make ten thousand a year he would never save a penny; but they always said that, if he would only take a deep-rooted dislike to beer and brandy, go to bed at ten and rise at seven, attend to his business and give up smoking pipes in the streets, he might obtain enough money to enable him to keep a carriage and live in good style.

How he met Dolly matters little. She

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was living in one room at Southbourne at that time, trying to obtain a livelihood by taking in needlework. She was miserably poor, with a little baby at her breast. Old Mr. Newcome, the rector, did his best for her, and allowed her what little he could afford out of his slender income, which enabled her to pay her rent. But she had to clothe and feed her child and herself, and the work she procured was scanty and poorly paid for. God knows how she managed to struggle through those days! Mr. Conway asked her to marry him, but she answered "No," bitterly, for her love for Holdsworth was a passion. Then her only friend, Mr. Newcome, died; her health broke down; she was absolutely destitute; and so, for her baby's sake—but shrinking from the marriage as one shrinks from the commis-

sion of an evil deed, and with a heart in her so heavy that nothing but her love for her child seemed to keep her alive—she gave her hand to Mr. Conway, and went to live with him at Hanwitch.

She had no affection for the man. Her marriage was a bitter necessity, and she hated it and herself for that. She had no knowledge of Conway's habits, though she had had penetration enough to miss certain moral qualifications which are to be felt and cannot be explained. Now she discovered that he was an intemperate, improvident man, hasty in his temper, selfish, and at the same time neglectful of his own interests.

He was some way ahead in his downward career when he married her. The addition his marriage made to his expenses quickened his pace, as an object, rolling

slowly at first, improves its velocity in proportion to the increase of its distance from the starting-point. One by one his patients deserted him. He insulted his landlord, to whom he owed money, who gave him notice to quit. He then hired the little house in which we have found him, and was now illustrating one of the great mysteries of social life—the mystery of living without money, of keeping a house over his head without a shilling in his pocket, of wearing boots and coats without the means in his purse to pay off the milkman's sixpenny score.

How is this done? There are people doing it every day. They are doing more: they are keeping men-servants, renting big houses, wearing fine dresses, frequenting fashionable haunts, on nothing a year. How Thackeray puzzled over this problem! How

Dickens tried to explain it and failed : for he is always driven to a last moment, when some good genius steps forward to help. Imagination can't deal with a feat which makes nothing do the work of a great deal.

There is no doubt something aggressive, even to good nature, in the brooding melancholy that goes about its duties lifelessly, which gives spiritless attention to matters of moment and significance, which looks complaint without speaking it, and addresses itself to every task of life with an air of reproachful endurance.

A man possessed of such an inflammable temper as Conway would be constantly taking fire in the presence of such a melancholy ; and it must be confessed that Dolly embodied the part with some degree of completeness. Silent and mournful submission to fate was the wrong attitude to assume



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towards a man in whom was a good deal of the fool. A powerful virago, with muscular arms and a venomous tongue, would have kept him to his work and out of the taverns by the irresistible influence of words supported by finger-nails.

Dolly, whose heart was never with him, soon learned to despise him. It is true that she endeavoured, at the beginning of their married life, to win him from his extravagant and reckless courses by entreaties and the mild persuasion of caresses ; but she soon ceased her appeals on finding that they took no effect, and only rarely alluded to his habits, which, having plunged them into poverty, were keeping them there, and sinking them lower and lower each day.

With an inconsistency not very uncommon, he resented her silence at the

same time that he knew the expression of her thoughts would enrage him. He was still sufficiently under the control of her beauty to feel jealous of her love, which he very well knew was with the man they both thought dead. That truth had leaked out long ago. He once heard her teaching her child to pray ; and presently lift up her own voice in a prayer which had no name in it but John's, whom she cried aloud to, bidding his spirit take witness of the sufferings which had driven her into an act that made her hateful to herself. Once, when her gentle sweetness was stirred into passion by him, she declared that she had never loved him ; that she had married him for her child's sake ; that if God took her babe from her she would kill herself, for her husband was in heaven, and his voice spoke in her conscience, eternally reproaching her

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for forgetting the vow they had made—*that though death should sunder them, the survivor would be true to love and memory, and live alone.*

But his petulance, his churlishness, his occasional brutality, indeed, was not owing to this. She had merely put his own knowledge of her into language; and since he had married her, fully persuaded that the gift of her hand had been dictated by pure necessity only, he could scarcely find himself alienated by the confession of her motive. Poverty and drink were the two demons that mastered him. And poverty without drink would have done the work; for his happened to be one of those boneless natures which give under a very small weight; one of those weak characters who, if they find themselves in a gutter, are satisfied to lie there and roll there, and

moisten the mud with which they bedaub those about them with tears, and make their settlements gross with oaths, and shrieks, and reproaches.

## CHAPTER V.

### FATHER AND CHILD.

ALL next morning Holdsworth kept watch for Dolly and his child, but did not see them. But Mr. Conway had passed when Mrs. Parrot happened to be in the room laying the cloth for dinner, and the woman had directed Holdsworth's attention to him. The glimpse he obtained, however, was very brief. All that he saw was a sandy-whiskered gentleman, with a tilted hat, aim with rather uncertain legs for the gate with the brass plate upon it, and vanish

with an alacrity that was painfully suggestive of a disordered vision.

"There he goes! Drunk as usual!" exclaimed Mrs. Parrot, disgustfully, giving the table-cloth an angry twitch.

"How does he live? I have seen nobody call at his house yet!"

"No, sir; and I don't think you're likely to. Persons as can't get served at the other tooth-drawers are too sensible to walk all this way to get their jaws broke."

"Are they *very* poor, do you think?"

"Why, sir, I suppose he must pay his rent somehow, but I don't know as he does anythink more. I'm told that they owe money all over the town, but the tradespeople make no fuss, because, as Mr. Jairing the butcher says to me, 'It's all very fine, Mrs. Parrot,' he says, 'talkin of hexecutions,

but what's the use o' going to the expense of a distress when there's nothin' to seize?' There's a deal in that, sir."

"God help them!" muttered Holdsworth to himself. Then looking up he said, "Do you think Mrs. Conway would let her little girl come and have tea with me this afternoon?"

"I should think she would, sir, and feel honoured by the askin'."

"I have not seen the child to-day."

"No, sir! Mrs. Conway don't often come out. She kapes a bit of a wench as does her arrands, and I've told the slut times out o' mind to put her bonnet on, an' not go flyin' down the road as though a orficer was arter her, disgracin' of our neighbourhood, and frightening away any respectable person as might be comin' wi' a bad tooth. I don't think of *him*, sir.

If I could put a sixpence in his way I would, for the sake of his wife an' the little one."

"How shall I invite little Nelly if I do not see her?"

"I'll run across, if you like, when I've got your dinner ready, and ask Mrs. Conway if she'll let the child come. Perhaps you'll just watch, sir, and tell me when the husband leaves the house. I don't want to meet him if I can help it."

An hour elapsed before Holdsworth saw Mr. Conway pass on his way to the High Street, on which he rang the bell and informed Mrs. Parrot that she might now call on Mrs. Conway in safety.

His anxiety to have the child impressed his landlady as a very odd thing. She could understand his admiration of Nelly; she could also understand his calling her



in and giving her a kiss and a present. No man's heart, she considered, could fail to be warmed by the sight of so pretty a little girl. But she could not understand him posting himself at the window, and looking troubled because he did not see the child, and showing himself as anxious to have her to tea as if she was a grown woman, and he was courting her.

She sailed across the road (watched by Holdsworth), her cap-strings streaming over her shoulders, and walked up to the door of the Conways' house, and gave a single knock. She was kept waiting so long, that when the door was at last opened by the "bit of a slut," who, to judge by her complexion, appeared to have been devoting the last hour or two to black-leading her face, Mrs. Parrot, instead of asking for Mrs. Conway, began storming at her for

“kaping respectable folks on the doorsteps while she sat readin’ ha’porths o’ bad fiction by the kitchen fire.”

“I wasn’t readin’. I didn’t hear yer. Who do you want—missus?” said the girl sulkily.

“Why, Mrs. Conway, of course. Show me in, and go an’ tell her at once that I’m here,” replied Mrs. Parrot, not waiting to be shown in, but pushing into the middle of the passage.

The girl shambled off, and presently Mrs. Conway came up the kitchen stairs. The skirt of her dress was pinned up at the waist, and her arm-sleeves were above her elbows, displaying the whiteness and fineness of the skin, though the arms were very thin.

“How do you do, Mrs. Parrot? You will excuse my wretched untidy appear-

ance. I am doing a little washing downstairs, and would not keep you waiting whilst I made myself presentable."

"Niver mention it, ma'am," answered Mrs. Parrot, looking with pleasure, mingled with pain, at the sweet face, in which, now that there was no hat to shadow it, the sorrow and care were clearly seen. Her prettiness was but enhanced by the looped-up skirt, showing the little feet and small, firm ankles. Her bright hair was in disorder, and there was the little flush of recent exertion on her cheeks.

"I've called wi' a message from my gentleman lodger. He wants Miss Nelly to drink tea with him, and sent me across to ask you to let her come."

"The same gentleman who gave Nelly a shilling yesterday?" asked Dolly, looking half surprised and half pleased.

"Yes, ma'am. He's a very nice person, and seems uncommon partial to children. He's been all the morning on the look-out for your little gal, and I hope you'll let her come, ma'am, and bring her doll wi' her, for I think he'll take it to heart if you refuse."

"Oh, I will certainly send her. Will half-past three do? I shall have to dress her. Pray give my compliments to the gentleman, and thank him for his kindness. You have not told me his name."

"Hampden, ma'am; Mr. Hampden."

"I have not yet seen him. Is he an old man? Few young men care for children."

"To tell you the truth, ma'am, I've got no more idea of his age, than I have of the age of my house. He's got a deal o'

gray hair on his head, and yet he isn't an old man either, although to see him walk, leanin' on his stick, you'd take him to be sixty. I think he means to make friends wi' your little gal, if you'll let him, just for want o' company. He don't seem to know anybody in Hanwitch, nor to follow any callin' like. I doubt he's a bit rich; but you see, ma'am, he only took my lodgin's the day before yesterday, and I've not had time to make him quite out yit."

Saying this, Mrs. Parrot dropped a courtesy, and turned to depart, taking a quick comprehensive glance at the dingy little parlour as she passed, and mentally comparing it with her own rooms.

Holdsworth was at the window when she returned, and she could hardly forbear

laughing, so tickled was she by his expectant face.

“Mrs. Conway’s compliments, sir, and she says that her little gal will be with you at half-past three, thankin’ you for your kindness,” said she, her eyes twinkling with her suppressed but perfectly good-natured mirth.

“Thank you, Mrs. Parrot, for taking so much trouble,” exclaimed Holdsworth gleefully. “What time is it now? A quarter to three. I shall just have time to walk into the High Street and buy a cake. She will like a cake—a plum-cake, I think; and shall I get some marmalade? Yes, she will enjoy marmalade—and what else? Tell me, Mrs. Parrot; what do little children like?”

“Why, mostly sweet things, sir. I guess the marmalade ’ll take Miss Nelly’s fancy.

But don't you trouble, sir; I can run out and buy you what you want."

"No—I am obliged to you. There are other things she might like which I shouldn't be able to remember without seeing them. We will have tea at four, Mrs. Parrot. I shall be back in twenty minutes."

Mrs. Parrot watched him leave the house and walk down the road as swiftly as he could, leaning on his stick. "Well, if iver I saw the like of this!" she exclaimed aloud. "I'll not tell mother; it might scare her. There is something downright sing'ler in the notion of a stranger takin' all this trouble, and goin' almost wild-like, all along of a little gal he never saw before yisterday. Some folks 'ud call it alarmin'."

*Her* nerves, however, were equal to the occasion; for whilst Holdsworth was away,

she journeyed upstairs and unlocked a little glass-fronted cupboard, screwed into a corner of her bedroom, from which she took a teapot, a cream-jug, and two cups and saucers of brilliantly-coloured china ; likewise from an open box under her bed a tray magnificently decorated with mother-of-pearl birds of paradise seated on pink trees, and surrounded by a prospect not to be paralleled on this side the moon.

She returned to the kitchen with these things, and then entered the garden and picked a bouquet of sweet-scented flowers, with which she furnished the tray. Then she set to work upon a loaf of bread, and produced in no time a number of thin and appetising slices ; which done, and the tray being arranged, she fell back a step to admire the effect.

At a quarter-past three Holdsworth re-



turned, followed by a boy with his arms full of bags. He called to Mrs. Parrot, who came out and took the bags from the boy, and placed them upon the dining-room table. More things than edibles had been purchased; though of these there was enough to give an evening party upon—fruit, cakes, pots of jam, gingerbread-nuts, sweetmeats, tarts; there was a doll; there was also a horse and cart; and there was an immense box of bricks.

Mrs. Parrot turned pale, and was much too astonished to speak, as Holdsworth thrust the bags and pots, the buns and the tarts, into her arms, and requested her to take them at once into the kitchen, and display them on plates to the very best advantage, ready for the little one when the bell should ring for tea. He then hid the toys in a closet, and stationed

himself at the window to watch for Nelly.

Punctual to the moment, she came out of the house, led by the hand by the servant, who looked horribly grimy. Holdsworth ran to the door and opened it, and when the child came timidly up to him, snatched her up in his arms, and hastened with her into the sitting-room, kissing her all the way.

"There's a good little pet," he said, sitting down and keeping her on his knee. "Let me take off your hat. Nelly mustn't be afraid of me."

"My own! my own!" he murmured, as his lingering fingers caressed her soft hair, and he gazed with passionate love at her big eyes, roving with a half-scared expression from his face around the room.

“Me dot dolly,” she said, producing the old toy from under her cloak.

“Ay, that’s right ; and dolly shall have a slice of cake all to herself. Here she is !” he exclaimed, seeing Mrs. Parrot peeping in at the door. “Will you take her hat and this little cape ?”

“How do you do, dear ?” said Mrs. Parrot, giving the child a kiss.

“Look at my frock !” exclaimed Nelly, holding up her dress, which had a little embroidery work upon it, and which bore marks of much patient mending and darning.

“Beautiful ! beautiful !” cried Mrs. Parrot. “I’ve set the kettle on to bile, sir, and tea ’ll be ready whiniver you’re pleased to want it.”

So saying, she dropped a courtesy, being greatly impressed by Mr. Hampden’s un-

doubted wealth, illustrated by his prodigal purchases, and withdrew.

Father and child ! A lonely man, gentle, honourable, faithful, as any whom God in His wisdom has chosen to afflict, opening his heart to receive and fold up the sweetness and innocence of his own little baby !

Ah ! I think even Mrs. Parrot might have guessed the strange mystery of this man's desire for the child, had she but watched him from some secret hiding-place when the door had closed upon her.

He surrendered himself to his emotion when he felt himself alone with the little girl, and for many moments could not speak to her, could do no more than look at her, searching her fairy lineaments with something almost of a woman's ecstasy, reading his brief history of hopeful, beautiful love in her fresh deep eyes, and drinking

in greedily the memories of the days that were no more, which thronged from the face that mirrored his as it was when Dolly knew him, as the dew-drop mirrors the sun.

But he was recalled to himself by the gathering expression of fear in Nelly. Indeed, there was something alarming enough to her in the concentrated passion, all soft and holy as it was, that shone in his fixed regard.

Such abandonment to feeling would not do, if the part he was to play was to be complete.

He placed her gently on the floor, and, going to the cupboard, brought out the doll.

“See, Nelly! here is a little lady I invited expressly to drink tea with you. She told me that she had often seen you

pass her shop in the High Street, and that she wanted to live with you. You must take her home when you leave me, will you?"

Nelly stood for a moment transfixed by the spectacle of this gorgeously-dressed creature, resplendent in blue gauze, bronzed boots, gilt sash, and flowing red feather. Then—so permanent is human affection—she threw down her old doll and ran forward, with outstretched arms, to welcome and hug the stranger.

But the sum of her amazement was not yet made out. Once more Holdsworth dived into the mysterious cupboard and produced the horse and cart, which, he told Nelly, was the chariot that had brought the young lady to his house, and without which she never condescended to take the air, being much too fine a lady to walk.

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The box of bricks followed ; and presently Nelly was on the floor, taking up the three toys one after the other in quick succession, her avariciousness of enjoyment perplexed by the number of the objects that ministered to it.

Holdsworth knelt by her side and watched her face.

A man need not be a father to find something elevating and purifying in the contemplation of a child's countenance, varied by tiny innocent emotions, reflecting the little play of her small passions, as her eyes reflect the objects that surround her. But that subtle and sacred bond, which unites a child's life to a parent's heart, creates an impulse to such contemplation which makes the pleasure sweeter than any other kind of pleasure, by the infusion of an exquisite pathos, mingled

with the only kind of pride to which vanity seems to contribute nothing.

The natural bitterness which Holdsworth felt in thinking that his little girl did not know him, that misfortune had thrust his love out of the sphere of her own and his wife's life, was converted into tender melancholy by the emotions Nelly's presence excited, and left his pleasure unalloyed by pain. Here was a little being who was his at least ; his by a right no sin, no folly, no error could challenge ; indisputably his, to survive, if God permitted, into his future, when the time should come for him to call himself aloud by the name of Father, and ask her love as some recompense for that present sacrifice of his which was enforced by grand obedience to the high laws of morality.

How hard it was to be thus true to

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himself, thus true to his wife, thus true to the little one who must needs share some portion of that obligation of shame which would befall them all, were he to confess himself—Judge! for you see him kneeling by his child's side; you may behold his love in his eyes; you may know that no upturned luminous glance of hers but thrills along the chords of his passion, and makes his heart gush forth its overfull tenderness, even until his sight grows humid, and he turns his thoughts in a piteous aside to God for courage and will, so to sustain this strange, pathetic happiness, that no sorrow shall follow it.

“Nelly, we will have tea now,” he says; and he rings the bell, and then comes up to the child again, and turns

her face up, kisses her suddenly, and seats himself at a distance with his chin upon his hand.

Then Mrs. Parrot came in, armed with the tray, which she placed upon the table, while she challenged her lodger's admiration by lightly lifting her gray eyes and smirking.

Yes, it was very beautiful. The bouquet made the room odoriferous at once; the birds of paradise looked splendid; the cups were elegant enough to induce one to go on drinking tea with stubborn disregard of the nervous system, for hours and hours together, if only for an excuse to handle them and have them under the eye. In order to bring Nelly's head a little above the level of the table, Holdsworth piled three or four of the folios on a chair, on which he seated her; and that the two

dolls might be seen to advantage, he very ingeniously tied them together, and set them on a chair, leaning against the table, with a plate and a slice of bread-and-butter before them; whereat Nelly laughed rapturously, clapping her hands and filling the room with sweet sounds.

It was all Fairyland, these cups and toys and cakes and what not, to the little girl, whose tea at home was often no more than a slice of dry bread, when her step-father had drunk away the money he should have given to his wife, and left her without the means to purchase an ounce of butter. The sun was at the back of the house, and its rays of yellow light flooded the floor at the extremity of the apartment, and flung a golden haze over that portion of the room where the table stood. There was something so charming in the

scene thus delicately lighted, that Mrs. Parrot, who had been struggling with her modesty for some minutes, while she fidgeted over the plates and dishes, suddenly exclaimed :

“I humbly beg parding for the liberty, sir, but would you mind mother just takin’ one peep ? She came into the kitchen while I was dressin’ the tray, an’ I told her what was goin’ forward, an’ I think it ’ud do her heart good to see this beautiful show.”

“Let her come by all means,” replied Holdsworth, touched and diverted by the perfect simplicity of these people.

Presently fell a respectful knock, and Mrs. Parrot re-entered, followed by a Roman nose that came and vanished like an optical delusion near the handle of the door.

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"Come in, mother; the gentleman's kind enough to say you may," said Mrs. Parrot; and in faltered the old woman, dropping an aged courtesy, and making her spectacles chatter in their wooden case as she strove to withdraw them.

"Ain't this a picter, mother?"

"Niver see anything to aquil it," replied the old lady, putting on her spectacles and gazing around her with many a convulsive motion of the head. "Why, Sairey, them's our best cups!"

"Yes, I told you I was usin' them. Don't you see the little gal, mother?"

"See her? Yes,—of course I do. But she don't want an old 'ooman like me to kiss her, eh, my pretty? I'm very much obleeged, sir," dropping a creaking courtesy, "for the sight o' this table."

“Would your mother like one of these cakes for her tea?” said Holdsworth.

“Oh, sir, you’re very good.—Mother, the gentleman wants to know if you’ll accept of one of these cakes for your tea?”

“Thank ye, sir. I relish a bit o’ some-thin’ sweet now and agin,” replied the old lady, dropping another courtesy as she received the cake. “I was cook to Squire Harrowden, lar’ bless yer! I dessay it were years afore you was born, and they did say as there niver was my aquil i’ the makin’ o’ pie-crust. I’ve cooked for as many as a hundred and tin persons, ay, that I have,” with intense earnestness, “as Sairey ’ll bear me witness, for she’s heerd the story from her own father, as was gamekeeper to the Squire, an’ a more likely man you niver see, sir. His name were Cramp, which he was a Croydon man, as you may happen to

know the name if you was iver in them parts?"

"Come, mother, we have stopped long enough," exclaimed Mrs. Parrot, putting her hand upon the old lady's arm.

They both courtesied; and then the old woman let fall the cake, which rolled under the table. Holdsworth recovered it for her, which act of condescension was so overwhelming that she let the cake fall again; on which Mrs. Parrot lost her temper, and hurried the old dame through the door at a velocity to which her legs were quite unused, and possibly quite unequal. She might be heard feebly remonstrating in a voice similar to the sound a key makes when turned in a rusty lock; and then the door was closed, and Holdsworth and Nelly were left alone.

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If Mrs. Parrot had dared, she would have been glad to advise Holdsworth "not to let the little gal eat too much, there bein' nothing worse nor sweetstuff for young stomachs, which finds milk-and-water sometimes too much for 'em." But, happily, Nelly was not a glutton; besides, the majority of human beings at her age eat only as much as they want, and no more; we wait until our judgment is matured, until life is precious, until we have experienced most of the distempers which arise from an overloaded stomach, before making ourselves thoroughly ill with over-feeding!

By this time the child was perfectly at home with Holdsworth, and enjoying herself immensely, varying a bite at a slice of cake with a bite at some bread covered with jam, sipping the good milk Holds-



worth had obtained for her with great gravity, and staring at the dolls, and then bending to make sure that her bricks had not taken to their heels while she was looking at the horse and cart, and that the horse had not bolted with the cart while she was looking at her bricks.

Holdsworth scarcely removed his eyes from her face. When he spoke to her there was a softness in his voice that melted like music on the ear.

At last she pushed her plate away, and Holdsworth rang the bell, and giving Mrs. Parrot private instructions to make up a parcel of the remainder of the cakes, &c., ready for Nelly to take home with her, he clasped the child's hand and went with her into the garden, she holding the new doll, he dragging the horse and cart after him.

There was a square of grass in this garden, and a bench on it; and here Holdsworth sat, while Nelly played with her toys.

It was a roomy, old-fashioned garden, with aged walls, full of rusty nails and rotten ligatures, and a few tall pear-trees sheltering a small circumference of ground at their feet; and many fruit-trees sprawling wildly against the walls. The moss was like a carpet on the flint walk, and the box at the side of the bed was high and thick; and at the top of the garden was an old hencoop, hedged about with wirework, behind which some dozen hens scratched the soil for worms, and made the air drowsy with their odd, half-suppressed mutterings.

Moods possess us, sometimes, which such a scene as this will affect more

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pleasurably than a garden bursting with exotics, and tended with the highest artistic judgment. There is something very calming in homely shrubs and old fruit-trees with their roots hidden by the long, vivid grass, and uncouth weeds thrusting their rude shapes among violet beds; and the solemn chatter of barn-door hens sunning themselves in hot spaces, or lying like dead things with a wing half-buried in sand and dirt, will sometimes impart a more agreeable tranquillity to the mind than the choicest songs of nightingales warbled in groves under a full moon.

Holdsworth suffered the child to have her full sportive will for some time, and then, thinking her tired, called her to him.

She ran to him at once, and he perched her on his knee.

"Is Nelly afraid of me now?"

"No. Nelly dot afraid. Nelly loves 'oo."

In proof whereof she put her mouth up for a kiss.

"Will Nelly come to see me every day?"

"Det."

"Does Nelly's papa love her?"

He believed that she had been taught to regard Mr. Conway as her papa. It was a sore tax upon the gentle mood then on him to put the question in that form, but he wished to learn if his child were well treated by her step-father.

The question puzzled her. Indeed, she was a very little thing, and backward in her speech. It was delicious to see her knit her tiny brows, and gaze with her full, deep, earnest eyes on Holdsworth, with a half-intelligence in her face, and all the rest child-sweetness.

Like all children, who cannot answer a question, she remained silent ; a hint parents would sometimes do well to take.

“Does Nelly get plenty to eat?”

“Det.”

This was not quite true ; but then Holdsworth, who knew nothing of children, was ignorant that little infants will borrow their answers from your voice or face, so that to get an affirmative from them you have only to speak or look affirmatively.

“Does mamma teach Nelly to pray?”

“Det. Nelly pray.”

And, to prove how well she could pray, she put her two hands together, hung down her head, and whispered :

“Dod bless dear mamma and Nelly. Dod bless little Nelly’s dear papa.”

She looked up coyly, as though ashamed.

Dear reader, smile not at these simple

words, nor think them puerile. When we behold a little child praying, we know how the angels worship God.

A sob broke from Holdsworth as she ceased. Who was little Nelly's dear papa but he? His wife's love had dictated that prayer, and it was their child who told him of her love. Ah! God had deigned to hear that prayer, whispered by a wife's heart through the lips of her infant, and had blessed him with this knowledge of her devotion, and had brought him from afar to know it.

No; not want of love had made her faithless to his memory. Faithless she was not—she could not be if her heart nightly spoke to God of him through her child.

Let him look at the little girl now; let him feel the fulness of the love she inspired in him; let him imagine that he was

desolate and friendless, and in want, and that this frail flower, this tender little lamb, pined and grew wan and ragged for food and raiment ; let him mingle with his own emotion the pain and torment which a mother's heart would feel in the presence of this baby's sufferings ; and then let him condemn his wife, if he could, for sacrificing her memories and accepting food and shelter from any hand that offered them under any honourable conditions.

He could not speak again for some time ; and Nelly growing tired of sitting, slipped from his knee, and betook herself to her toys.

Then his eyes kindled anew, and he watched her eagerly. He longed to ask her questions—to hear her lisp him sweet assurances of his Dolly's love—to learn from her little lips that her mother was his, had

been, would always be his, though separated from him by a barrier as formidable as death. But there was no question he could put which the child might not repeat again; for backward as she was in speech, her small, imperfect language would be intelligible enough to the mother. His curiosity would be too unnatural in a stranger not to excite Dolly's suspicions; and if they should not even lead to the discovery of his secret, they might be the means of breaking off all intercourse between him and his child.

And so he remained silent; and presently, as he sat watching the little creature pushing her doll to and fro in the cart and talking to herself, a calm came upon his heart—a sense of exquisite repose and security. You would have said, to look upon him and remark the placid sweetness that reigned in his face, that the child's prayer had



veritably done its office—that God had blessed him, indeed.

A long hour passed. The garden was fresh and cool ; the declining sun mellowed the gray walls and kindled many little suns in the vine-draped windows ; the sparrows flitted quickly with short chirrup from tree to tree ; and the crooning of the hens added completeness to the peace and tenderness that breathed in the air.

Once again Nelly was on Holdsworth's knee, fetching vague replies from her struggling perceptions for his questions, when Mrs. Parrot came out of the house and said that Mrs. Conway was in the sitting-room, waiting to take her little girl home.

Holdsworth glanced quickly at the window of the room, but did not see her. He put the child down hurriedly, and said :

"There, my little pet, run along with Mrs. Parrot."

"Won't you come and speak to Mrs. Conway, sir?" asked Mrs. Parrot. "She wants to thank you for your kindness."

"No—no—pray don't let her call it kindness," stammered Holdsworth, who was very pale.

"I'm sure she'll take it unkind if you won't let her thank you, sir," said Mrs. Parrot earnestly. "She's been watching you both through the window for the last five minutes, an' I couldn't help tellin' her what a fine treat you have given Miss Nelly. Besides, she's seen them toys," she added, looking at Nelly's presents.

A whole lifetime of nervous pain was in that moment's pause. Could he meet her, speak to her, and remain unknown? His desire was to hide. It seemed incon-

ceivable that in five years such a change should be wrought in him as to render him unrecognisable by his wife.

But the pressing necessity of immediate action was too sudden to give his imagination time to alarm his judgment. He must dare the encounter, since it was not to be obviated by any means which might not prove more productive of suspicion than bold confrontation.

He laid the utmost tyranny of his will upon his feelings, and saying :

“Perhaps you are right, Mrs. Parrot. Mrs. Conway will think me rude if I do not see her,” took Nelly’s hand and walked with her to the house.

Dolly was seated in an arm-chair near the fireplace, leaning her cheek on her hand. Her attitude showed that she had been watching the group in the garden.

She stood up when Holdsworth entered and bowed to him.

Nelly ran to her, holding up her doll.

“Look, mamma!”

The action was timely; it enabled Holdsworth to walk to the side of the window, where the shadow lay darkest, and there he stood.

This he had sense enough to do; but for a moment or two the room swam round him, and he grasped the back of a chair.

*Would she know him?*

That thought swept like a galvanic shock through him, and made his blood tingle.

It brought hope with it and fear; a wild paradoxical emotion of yearning love and the blighting sense of the sorrow and dishonour recognition would involve.

“I have to thank you very much, Mr.

Hampden, for your attention to my little girl," she said in a low sweet voice — how remembered !

"Her society gives me great happiness," he replied, with the faintest tremor in his tone.

It might have been that sign of agitation which made her look at him suddenly.

His gaze sank. But he felt her eyes upon his face, and the eager, restless scrutiny that filled them.

But if ever a memory of something infinitely beloved to her had been renewed by his reply, it melted upon her conviction of the death of him whom Holdsworth's voice had recalled to her, as snow upon water.

Could it have been otherwise ?

Not five years—not twenty years—not a lifetime, maybe, of ordinary sufferings

could have so transformed his face but that her love could have pierced the mask.

But the unnatural misery of those ten days in the open boat—the hunger that had wasted, the agonising thirst that had twisted his face out of all likeness to what it had been, the growth of beard and moustache that hid the lower part of the countenance, the gray hair, the bare forehead, the deformed eyebrows, the rugged indent between the brows, the stooped form !—

Here was a transformation that would have defied a mother's instincts — that would have offered an impenetrable front to perception barbed into keenness by the profoundest love that ever warmed the heart.

And yet, looking at this woman attentively—looking at her gazing at yonder

man, cowering, it might almost seem, in the friendly shadow of the wall—there was something in her eyes, something in her face, something in her whole manner that would have quickened your pulse with a moment of breathless suspense.

In such matters, as in the loss of memory, we must recognise the existence of a deep spiritual insight having no reference to the revelations of the mind. There are convictions which do not satisfy, though cemented by logic and acted on by their possessor with sincere conscience. Against such convictions instincts will surge as waves break upon a shore. Echoes are awakened, but are thought purposeless. And the conviction is still maintained, while the secret truth rolls at its base.

The voice of Holdsworth, but not his face, had set Dolly's instincts in motion.

But then her conviction that Holdsworth was dead was a permanent one ; and under it her instincts subsided into uneasy sleep, though there was a shadow of melancholy on her face when she removed her eyes, which had not been there before Holdsworth spoke.

“I hope Nelly has been good, Mr. Hampden.”

“Very good, indeed.”

He seemed to know that the crisis was passed, for he breathed more freely, looked at her, and removed his hand from the chair.

“These toys are very beautiful. I really feel unable to express my gratitude to you.”

“You owe me no thanks. My gratitude is due to you for allowing your sweet little girl to come and see me.”



"Mrs. Parrot tells me you are very fond of children?"

"Very. I hope little Nelly will often be here. I am quite alone, and she cheers me with her pretty prattle."

She glanced at him quickly and sympathetically, as he said he was alone, and sighed.

Holdsworth noticed that her dress was very shabby; but her beauty lost nothing by her apparel. He thought her looking sweeter than when he had left her five years before. Her riper charms were made touching by an under colouring of sadness, and there was languor in her movements and speech—sign of heart-weariness.

"It is time for us to get home, Nelly," she said, looking uneasily towards the window. "Go and give Mr. Hampden a

kiss, and thank him prettily for his beautiful presents."

The child approached Holdsworth, who kissed her gently, repressing the passionate emotion that, had he been alone, would have prompted him to raise her in his arms and press her to his breast.

"Here are some little cakes," he said, taking the parcel Mrs. Parrot had prepared, and giving them to the child, but addressing Dolly, "which will amuse her to play with. When may she come again, Mrs. Conway?"

"Oh, she must not intrude . . ."

"No, no! she cannot come too often. Pray let me make a companion of her. She has completely won my heart. May she not walk with me sometimes? I promise to take as much care of her as if she were my own child."

He had advanced a step and spoke eagerly, bending forward ; but meeting her full eyes fixed on him with a little frown of mingled fear and amazement, he turned pale, fell back a step, and forcing a smile, said hurriedly :

“ I am sometimes—sometimes laughed at for—for my love of children.”

She did not answer him for some moments, but stood watching him with a startled expression, suggesting both fascination and terror. Then she averted her eyes slowly, the colour went out of her cheeks, and she murmured something under her breath.

“ You remind me of one who was very dear to me . . . I beg your pardon . . . there is often a strange resemblance in the tones of voices.”

She took her child's hand, and was mechanically walking to the door.

"Me want dolly and horse," said Nelly, holding back.

Holdsworth picked up the toys, and went into the passage to open the door. They bowed to each other, and Holdsworth returned to the sitting-room.

The moment he had dreaded had come and was gone. He had met his wife, spoken with her, and she did not know him.

He had noticed the sudden surprise and fear that had come into her face ; he had noticed the deeply thoughtful mood in which she had quitted the house. But these things proved no more than this : that a note, familiar to her ear, still lived in the tones of his voice, and had aroused for awhile the memory which rarely dis-

turbed her now, save in dreams at night.

Well! what he wished had happened. Suffering had deformed him, time had changed him, to some purpose. He could play the game of life anew, as one freshly come upon the stage. His paradise was closed to him, but he could stand at the gate and be a looker-on at the sphere in which his most sacred interests played their parts; he could respect and uphold, by his withdrawal and secrecy, her, whose vows to him his imagined death had cancelled; he could have his child for a playmate, and sow in her heart those seeds of love, which, if God should ever suffer her to know her father, would, in the fulness of time, bless him with an abundant harvest of happiness.

But, though he would not, for the worth

of his life, have had things otherwise than they were, yet, as he stood in the room from which the light had departed with his child's sweet face, the tears rose to his eyes and sobs convulsed him.

Oh, it was hard to look back upon his sufferings, and feel that nothing but suffering yet remained; hard and bitter to behold those whom he loved, those whose love would spring to meet him were he to make but one little sign, and to know that he was as dead to them as if the great desolate sea rolled over his body.

But here was a noble self-sacrificing heart that could not long mourn its own afflictions. High virtues are always pregnant with high consolations, and a good man's grief for himself is short because he carries many tender ministers to it in his bosom. There was no triumph now to complete, for his

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conquest over impulse had been achieved at Southbourne. He drew to the open window at the back, where the air was fragrant with the smell of hay from the meadows beyond, and the cool evening perfumes of flowers hidden amid the shrubbery in the garden, and watched the sun sinking, whilst his thoughts followed it to the distant deep, whose breast it overhung, and on whose lonely surface he had watched it rising and setting with a despair the memory of which filled him with thoughts too deep for tears.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DOLLY'S THOUGHTS.

THREE days passed before Holdsworth saw Nelly again. He then, from his window, beheld her playing on the pavement opposite with the horse and cart he had given her.

He called, and she came running over to him gleefully at once.

Mrs. Parrot was dispatched to request Mrs. Conway's leave that Nelly might stop to tea with Mr. Hampden, and returned to say that "the little gal might, with the greatest of pleasure."

Again and again Nelly was summoned



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out of the road by Holdsworth, sometimes of a morning, sometimes of an afternoon, when he could see her. The little creature soon learnt to resist all her mother's suggestions that she should play in the back garden; she liked the pavement in the road, especially the pavement opposite Holdsworth's lodgings, and with an air of inscrutable mystery would keep a sharp look-out for Holdsworth, while she feigned to be absorbed in her toy. Ah, the artfulness of some little girls! But then there were always gingerbread and cakes for her in the miraculous cupboard in the corner of Holdsworth's room; and the temptation to obtain these luxuries, and to evade the slice of bread and cup of thin milk and water which formed her evening meal at home, was sometimes powerful enough to send her toddling out of the back garden,

where her mother placed her, into the road, actually unobserved by mamma, who, imagining that she still played in the garden, would be astonished by Mrs. Parrot coming across and saying that Miss Nelly was with Mr. Hampden, and please might she stop to tea.

Often, if Holdsworth had the good fortune to see his little girl in the morning, or early in the afternoon, he would put on his hat, and leaving word with Mrs. Parrot to tell Mrs. Conway, should she ask, that he had taken Nelly for a walk, clasp the child's hand and stroll with her into the town.

Nelly enjoyed these rambles hugely. Their two figures contrasted strangely, and many a woman's eyes would follow them, because the measured step, the thoughtful brow, the sunken face of the man, and the golden-haired child at his side, with

her bright young face and big eyes drinking in the sights and processions of the streets, and little twinkling feet, tripping so fleetly and dancingly along, that one would say she held his hand to prevent herself flying away, formed a picture which a woman's heart would love to contemplate for its prettiness.

They would sometimes turn out of the hot streets, when Nelly's listless glance would show her weary at last of the splendours of the toy-shops (before which they regularly stopped) and wander to the river's side; and there, in the shadow of trees, Holdsworth would rest himself, while Nelly cleared the space around her of all the daisies and buttercups she could find.

These were hours of deep and calm enjoyment to Holdsworth, who, until the chimes

of the town clocks warned him to rise, would lie, with his head supported on his elbow, that his face might be close to Nelly's, that he might catch every fluctuating expression that made her eyes an endless series of sweet signs, that he might hear every faltering syllable that fell from her lips.

Soft and cool were the sounds the river made, as its gentle tide gurgled a secret music among the high rushes, or rippled round stumps of trees or projections of stone lodged in the bank. Winged insects flashed many-coloured lights upon the eye as they swept from shadow to shadow, parted by a rivulet of sunshine falling through the openings in the trees. Now and again a trout leaped with a pleasant and lazy splash. From the shores opposite, behind the trees, came the smell of the

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warm red clover, mingled with the multitudinous hum of bees. Afar, at a bend of the stream, an angler might stand watching his quill, with his head and shoulders mirrored in the clear water—so exquisite the counterfeit that one might easily make a parable out of it, and sermonise slumberously, as befitted the drowsy influence of the hot day, on those illusions of life which mock the heart they mislead in its search after truth.

Once, when Holdsworth was taking Nelly home, after a long rest on the river's edge, he met Mr. Conway, who stared very hard, but passed on without addressing the child. Nelly drew close to Holdsworth when she saw the man.

Holdsworth knew Conway perfectly well by sight now. The dentist had repeatedly passed the window at which Holdsworth

stationed himself on the look-out for Nelly ; and of late, it might have been noticed, he would glance with no unfriendly expression towards Mrs. Parrot's old-fashioned house.

His walk, when he did not actually reel, as he very often did, might have been studied with some disgust as an illustration of character. It was a species of gliding movement, such as a man might be supposed to adopt, whose self-abasement he himself holds irrevocable, and who has made up his mind no longer to walk, but to sneak through life. The influence of importunate creditors might be marked in the quick, furtive glancing of the eye, that wandered from side to side and challenged every individual it rested upon. One half-dulled perception of his social obligations might yet linger ; or perhaps it

was an innate love of dress which, from being a vice in prosperity, would degenerate into a kind of sickly virtue in poverty, that gave him an indescribable air of seedy jauntiness, tilting his soiled hat, swathing his neck in a bright kerchief, and furnishing his body with a small-waisted frock-coat.

It was very natural that Mrs. Parrot's lodger should be somewhat of a mystery to him. Having no liking for children himself, but, on the contrary, a rather decided aversion to them, he could not understand what this Mr. Hampden saw in Nelly to make him so prodigal in his gifts, so eager for her society.

Who *was* he? As Mrs. Parrot made a point of avoiding him, he could not very well question her about her lodger; but since she was the only person in Hanwitch

who was likely to know anything about him, he got one of her tradesmen to cross-examine her. But this *ruse* resulted in little. All that Mrs. Parrot could tell was, that her lodger's name was Hampden, that he was a gentleman with rather queer habits, and that he seemed to have lots of money.

It was something to find out that he had lots of money.

On the strength of this Mr. Conway suddenly discovered Nelly to be a very interesting child, and never seemed more pleased than when she was over the way at Mrs. Parrot's.

The fact was, the dentist had an idea. It was a small, contemptible, tricky idea, such as poverty and drink would beget between them. He kept it to himself and waited.



Dolly, of course, was deeply gratified by Mr. Hampden's affection for her child. At first her curiosity had been morbidly excited by this stranger. Something there had been in his voice which stirred memory to its centre: and the strange, baffling, elusive thoughts it had induced kept her spiritless and nervous for some days after the interview between them. Twice she dreamed of the husband she believed dead. The dream, in both instances, was perplexed, and left no determinable impression; but its iteration increased her melancholy, and made memory painful and importunate.

She accounted for her feelings by referring them to the recollections which had been abruptly renewed—dragged, so to say, from the grave in which they lay hidden; and this clue being put into her

hand, left her easy as to the *raison d'être* of her depression.

Indeed, no suspicion of this stranger's identity with Holdsworth could have entered her mind without being instantly followed by conviction. The thought never occurred to her: how *could* it? She believed him dead, and the permanent habit of this belief took the quality of established proof of his death.

But even if she had doubted his death; if ever she had cherished the hope that he would one day return to her—a hope she had held to passionately for awhile, but which had dropped dead out of her heart when she gave her hand to Mr. Conway—no memory that she had of him would admit the possibility of the change that had been wrought in him.

There was a sign to be made—a look, a

smile, a whisper—which would flash perception into her, knit into compact form the thoughts which his voice had troubled, and confess him her HUSBAND, though hollow-faced and wan ; though stricken as with age ; though presenting the ineffaceable memorials of grievous torture.

But, until this sign should be made, he must be a stranger to her ; a puzzle, perhaps ; a man of eccentric habits, and of an odd and striking aspect—but not her husband.

Nor, strange as his suddenly-acquired affection for Nelly might seem to others, could it come to her as a surprise. The mother's vanity would easily account for the pleasure her little daughter gave to the lonely man.

Once, when Mrs. Parrot, meeting her in the road, said that “It did seem strange

that a man an' a child, as had niver set eyes on each other before, should love each other in the way Mr. Hampden and Miss Nelly did :” Dolly answered, “ Yes ; but though I am her mother, yet I must say that Nelly is a pretty and very winning child, and there is nothing uncommon in strangers taking a fancy to children.”

No ; that was quite true, Mrs. Parrot answered ; and told a story of a rich lady admiring a little beggar girl in the street ; and how the rich lady took the wench into her carrich, and got the parients' leaf to adopt her ; and how the beggar girl came into the rich lady's fortin, and grew up into a stately an' 'aughty woman, an' married a lord, she did, as was beknown to many.

“ It 'ud be a comfortin' thing to you, ma'am, don't you think, if Mr. Hampden

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was to adopt your little gal. It 'ud be a relief to your feelings, wouldn't it?" Mrs. Parrot said.

If some half-formed thought, bearing a resemblance to Mrs. Parrot's view, had flitted across Dolly's mind, let us not marvel. Never was her mood sadder, never was her secret grief sharper, than when her child's future formed the subject of her thoughts. Who would give Nelly a home if she died? Who would love the little thing; rear her in the knowledge of God, of her broken-hearted mother, of her poor drowned father?

"I could not part with her, Mrs. Parrot; she is the only link that binds me to by-gone happy days. I could not spare her. My life would be *too* lonely for me to support it. But I often pray to God that she may find a friend—such a friend as

I am sure Mr. Hampden would make her—when I am dead.”

This hope—that Mr. Hampden *would* prove that friend—was the real source of the comfort that filled her heart each time she saw her little girl trip across to Mrs. Parrot’s house.

She seldom saw Holdsworth. Sometimes she thought he avoided her. Twice, when she was leaving or returning to her house, she saw him in the porch, and each time he hastily withdrew, when she would have crossed over to speak to him. On rare occasions she met him coming from the town. Once he raised his hat and passed on: once she went up to him to thank him for his kindness to Nelly. He answered her hurriedly, speaking with an effort, and terminated the interview almost abruptly by bowing and leaving her. Then, again,

his voice affected her powerfully. She stopped and looked after him ; and went on her way, brooding, with a little frown of anxious, painful thought.

On his part, the weight of his secret, when they thus met, face to face, was insupportable. The wild rush of impulse, combated by inflexible resolution, created a conflict in his breast beyond his capacity of endurance. He could not have prolonged a conversation with her. It was shocking to feel himself unknown ; it was shocking to feel that he might betray himself. But he could watch her from his window. He knew now her hours of going and coming, and would station himself behind the curtain, and follow her with exquisite tenderness in his eyes, and sadness, crueller than words can tell, in his heart.

How was this all to end ?

Here was the thought that now tormented him. Six weeks had passed since he came to Hanwitch. He was living frugally, indeed ; and of the money he had brought with him from Australia a large portion still remained. But his few hundred pounds made a very slender capital ; and when they were spent, what then ?

He knew very well that he could return to Sydney, that Mr. Sherman would welcome him back, and reinstate him in his old post. But the mere thought of leaving England was misery to him. Suppose, under any plea, he obtained Dolly's leave to take Nelly with him, could he part from Dolly ? He might never see her again. Then let him think of her companion ; of the sordid, hungry life he *knew* she was leading—knew, though he could devise no



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expedient for relieving her, that might not be resented as an affront and lose him Nelly's companionship.

He would rather leave her in her grave than leave her as she was.

If urgent distress should ever come upon her, he would be at hand to succour and support her. And that such urgent distress *must* come sooner or later—that the day sooner or later *must* arrive when she and her child would be without a home, he had but to watch the maundering man who passed his windows backwards and forwards day after day, aimless, sodden, and growing shabbier and shabbier every week in his appearance, to know.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A VISIT.

How was Holdsworth to get a living? For what was he fit? He was a good clerk; Mr. Sherman had called him so, at least; Hanwitch was a tolerably large place, and he ought to find no difficulty in obtaining employment. At any rate, he must try.

One morning he put on his hat and walked into the town.

When he reached the High Street, he stopped and considered.

There was a bank; he could apply there. Then there was a brewery. If these failed, there remained an insurance office.

These represented polite avocations.

There were shops in abundance, where men, better looking than he, smiled over counters, and carried parcels, and stood bare-headed on the pavement at carriage-doors. But Holdsworth was still too much the sailor at heart to tolerate the notion of shop-serving. He would start a little school rather than do that. And indeed school-keeping seemed more feasible than anything else. Mrs. Parrot's lodgings would serve him there; boys would assemble by degrees; and he could set and hear lessons, and teach writing and mathematics as well as any university man.

Meanwhile, let him try the bank.

It faced the market-place in the High Street, had a well-worn door-step and stout, noisy swinging doors. Holdsworth entered, and found himself in a badly-lighted office,

with a counter across it, behind which were three or four clerks. A man who looked a fourth-rate farmer was paying money in, and whilst he counted a great accumulation of greasy silver, which he had discharged in company with a number of soiled, infragrant cheques out of a leather bag, he paused at every twenty to submit an observation of a rural nature to the intelligence of an elderly personage with long whiskers, and a somewhat Hebraical cast of visage, behind the counter.

The manager, for so the long-whiskered man was, observing Holdsworth to be a stranger, politely asked him his business.

"Can I speak to the manager?"

"Certainly, sir; *I* am the manager. Walk this way, please."

Saying which, the manager bustled im-

portantly into a back-room, and threw open a side door for Holdsworth to enter.

“Pray be seated, sir. Nice weather.”

And the manager drew a chair to a desk, clasped his hands on a volume of interestables, and fixed his eyes on Holdsworth.

“I have called to inquire if you are in want of a clerk,” said Holdsworth.

“I beg your pardon?” exclaimed the manager.

Holdsworth repeated his remark, adding that he was in want of a situation, and would be glad to fill any vacancy there might be in the staff of the bank clerks.

The manager, who had expected something very different from this, got up instantly; his business-smile vanished, he thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, and exclaimed:

"Clerk, sir! Who told you we wanted a clerk?"

"Nobody. I have called here at my own suggestion."

"God bless my heart! You are quite out of order, sir! Really, these intrusions upon my time . . . you should have explained your wish at the counter. When we want a clerk, we know where to find one, backed, sir, with first-class securities and influential recommendations."

"Then I have made a mistake, that's all," said Holdsworth, surveying the manager with great disgust; and paying no further heed to the protests with which the other followed him to the door, he walked into the High Street.

This summary treatment was enough to last him one day. His indignation yielded

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to depression, and he returned slowly and moodily to his lodgings.

This was the first time in his life he had ever made an application for employment; and his reception, which was really genteel and civil compared to the receptions experienced by men, old and young, every day, in search of work, at the hands of employers, wounded his sensibility and filled him with a sense of degradation.

He regained his lodgings, and endeavoured to console himself with philosophy.

But philosophy, says Rochefoucauld, triumphs over future and past ills; but present ills triumph over philosophy.

His sensibility did not smart the less because he reflected that hundreds of better men than himself had been insulted by rejections as offensive as that with which

his inquiry had been encountered. Something resembling the old spirit that had once made him catch hold of a big, hulking Irish sailor, and kick him clean off the fore-castle for striking a boy, rose ; and I really believe that, had that bank-manager presented his sharply-lined countenance at that moment, Holdsworth's fist would have considerably modified the Eastern expression that decorated it.

Thoughts of something tender and innocent will often quell the stubbornest warmth. Holdsworth grew mild in a moment when his mind went to little Nelly.

"I'll try the brewery to-morrow," he said to himself ; "and if that fails me, I'll advertise for a situation ; and if nothing comes of that, I'll start a school."

Thus thinking he walked to the window, hoping to see his child in the road.



Nobody was visible but the old politician with the inflamed face, who was pacing slowly along the pavement, his hands locked behind him, his eyes bent downwards, and his brow frowning grimly. Presently, Holdsworth knew, the other old politician, who lived at the corner house, would come out, and there would be much gesticulation, and violent declamation, and frequent pauses, and moppings of the forehead with red silk pocket-handkerchiefs. Rain had fallen in the night, and cleansed the little gardens in front of the villas of the three weeks' accumulation of dust that had settled upon them, and freshened up the leaves and grass. In the bit of ground before Mrs. Parrot's house the flowers had withered on their stalks, but the shrubs still wore the bright greenness of summer; the soil was dark and rich with the grate-

ful moisture, and breathed a fragrance of its own upon the morning air.

Holdsworth was about to quit the window when he caught sight of Mr. Conway coming out of his gate. He fell a step back, and watched the man from behind the curtain. Mr. Conway advanced a few yards along his own side of the road, and then crossed, with his eyes fixed on Holdsworth's window.

Was he coming to the house? He moved softly and furtively; and when he was abreast of Mrs. Parrot's gate, threw a glance behind him, pushed the gate open, and knocked.

As Holdsworth did not know the man to speak to, he did not for a moment suppose that this visit was meant for him. Much was he surprised, and even agitated, when Mrs. Parrot came in and said that

Mr. Conway was in the passage, and would like to see him.

The first idea that rushed into Holdsworth's head was, "I am known!"

But conjectures were out of the question, for the man was waiting.

"Pray show Mr. Conway in," he said; and in Mr. Conway came.

Holdsworth bowed, and so did the other, with a kind of spasmodic grace—a good bow spoiled by nervousness. He had dressed himself with care; he was cleanly shaved; his hair was carefully brushed; his shirt collars were white; and his boots shone.

Holdsworth had never before seen him so close. The light from the window fell upon his face and showed the cobweb of veins in his eyes, the puffy whiteness of his skin, the blueness of his lips, the tinge of gleaming

purple about his nostrils, and all the other signals which the alcoholic fiend stamps upon the countenances of his votaries, so that, let them go where they will, they may be known and loathed by honest men as his adopted children.

But he was sober now ; as sober as a man can be who has drank but a glass of ale since he left his bed, but whose flesh is soaked with the abomination of the taverns, and whose brain can never be steady for the fumes that rise incessantly into it.

“ Mr. Hampden, I believe ? ” he exclaimed in a creamy voice, standing near the door, which Mrs. Parrot had shut behind him, and twisting his hat in his hands.

“ Yes ; pray be seated,” replied Holdsworth, looking at him steadily, certain now that the object of this visit was not what he had imagined it.

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Mr. Conway sat down, and put his hat on the floor. His embarrassment, when his business should come to be known, might show a possibility of redemption, or at least satisfy us that most of the bad qualities he was accredited with might have been absorbed into his nature with the drink he swallowed. No thoroughly bad man could feel the nervousness that disturbed him.

"I have called, Mr. Hampden, to thank you for your kindness to my little step-daughter. Indeed, sir, both my wife and myself thoroughly appreciate your goodness. Believe us, we do."

"Pray do not trouble to thank me. She is a sweet child, and it makes me happy to have her," answered Holdsworth, now at his ease, and studying his visitor with curiosity and surprise.

"Ah! she is indeed a sweet child. A perfect treasure to her mother, and quite a little sunbeam in my house—darkened, I regret to say, by misfortunes beyond my control to repair."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"I never can sufficiently deplore having adopted so ungrateful a vocation as dentistry. I was born to better things, Mr. Hampden. My father had an influential position under Government; but he died in poverty, and I was apprenticed by an uncle . . . pray forgive me. These matters cannot interest you. Privations press heavily upon a man at my time of life. Dentistry seems to fail me; and yet, when I look around, I find no other calling which I am qualified to espouse."

He sighed, and pulled out a pocket-handkerchief, with which he wiped his mouth.

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Holdsworth was silent.

“Poverty I could endure, were I alone in the world,” continued Mr. Conway; “but it is unendurable to me to witness the best of women and the dearest of little children in want. My poor wife does not complain; but I witness her secret sufferings in her wasting form and irrepressible tears, and it goes to my heart, sir, to see her, and feel my miserable incapacity to relieve her.”

“Do you mean to say that she is actually in want?” exclaimed Holdsworth, in a low voice.

“Yes, sir; we all are. As I hope to be saved, I haven’t more than two shillings in the wide world!”

“Have you no source of income outside your profession?”

“No. I did well in the High Street;

but I had many rivals and enemies, who spread lying reports about me, and lost me my best patients. Give a dog a bad name! I left my establishment in the heart of the town, and came into this road because rent was cheap here; and God knows if I can tell how I have lived since," he cried passionately, his natural bad temper breaking through his affectation of suffering and ill-treatment. "The pawnbroker has been my only friend! Am I to sell the bed from under me? Oh, sir, I think of my wife, of my poor little child—for my child she is, if love can make her so—and the thought is death to me!"

He flourished his handkerchief and looked piteously at Holdsworth.

"How can I serve you?"

"Ah, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Conway,



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sinking his voice into a yet more whining note, the while a gleam entered into his eyes; "what right have I to trespass upon the benevolence of a stranger? of a gentleman who has already placed me under a thousand obligations by his kindness to my little daughter? I feel myself a wretch, sir, when I reflect upon the unfortunate position I have placed my poor wife in. I was flourishing in those days; I could have given—I *did* give her and her baby a good home. But what position is so secure that it can stand against the lies of rivalry and jealousy? the slanderous reports of ruffians who make capital for themselves out of a neighbour's trifling errors, and—and—oh! damn them!"

"How can I serve you?" said Holdsworth, coming quietly back to the point, for he had heard enough of the man's character

to enable him to judge that all this hectoring was no more than the studied gabble of fictitious sentiment.

"If I dare name my wants to you, sir—if I dare presume upon that benevolence which you have so signally illustrated in your behaviour to little Nelly, I—I——"

"I am a poor man," said Holdsworth, as the other paused; "and can afford but little. But that little is cheerfully at the service of your wife and child, who must not be allowed to want."

He spoke emphatically, to let the man understand the purpose to which he intended his gift or loan should be applied.

"But for that wife and child, sir," answered Mr. Conway, apparently struggling with his emotion, "*could* I place myself in this position? Is there any personal necessity, however imperative,

that would force me to lose sight of the pride which renders starvation preferable to alms-seeking, to the gentleman born? No, sir," he continued, with an air of injured dignity, "poor as I am, I can still recognise the claims of my birth upon my actions; and I repeat, that were it not for my wife and her little one, no affliction, however unsupportable, should oblige me to intrude even upon *your* benevolence."

He paused, and seeing Holdsworth look impatient, exclaimed hurriedly :

"If ten pounds——" and stopped.

"You wish to borrow ten pounds?"

"Ah, sir, if I dare——"

"Of what service will so small a sum be to you?"

The man looked struck; Holdsworth had expected to hear a larger sum named, he thought.

"Ten pounds—to a poor man—to a poor family, sir, ten pounds is a great deal of money."

"I will lend you ten pounds willingly, on condition that you spend it on your wife and Nelly."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Mr. Conway, meekly. "You may depend upon being repaid, if I have to pawn the shirt off my back to get the money."

I suppose that this kind of security (generally offered by men who have not the least idea of repaying a loan), must be figurative—a poetical figure of debt. How far would the shirt off a man's back help the redemption of the debts borrowed on the strength of it?

Holdsworth gave Mr. Conway two five-pound notes. The man took them eagerly, and whilst he buried them in his trousers'

pocket, poured forth a profusion of thanks.

"Does Mrs. Conway know of this visit?" asked Holdsworth, stopping his noise.

"No, sir; but, believe me, I shall not fail to acquaint her with your kindness," he answered, taking his hat and rising.

Holdsworth's impulse was to request him not to speak to her of this gift—for loan it would be ridiculous to call it. But he checked himself with the consideration that, were Mr. Conway to break his word, Dolly would find food for dangerous questioning in the request.

He said, instead, "You will not forget the purpose for which I have lent you this money?"

"Trust me, sir; trust me," murmured Mr. Conway, pressing his hat to his heart.

“If you will give me ink and paper I will make you out an I O U at once.”

“Never mind that. Nelly is a growing child, and requires nourishing food : devote the money to her and her mother, and you will make me grateful.”

He walked into the passage, and Mr. Conway, bowing humbly, passed into the porch, where he stood a moment or two peeping at his house ; then, with another bow, hurried into the road, and vanished in the direction of the town.

The poverty of the Conways, then, was unquestionable. Holdsworth had often speculated upon their position, but had never reached nearer to the mark than supposing that they lived from hand to mouth, and just made shift to support the day that was passing over them. That they

were actually in want, actually destitute indeed, it had never entered his mind to imagine. He believed Conway's story. And it was very certain that, if the man had no private means of his own, he must be hopelessly poor, for he made nothing by his profession. In all the six weeks that Holdsworth had been in Hanwiche he had not seen as many people call at Conway's house; and of these, supposing them to be patients, half of them had come away after speaking with the servant, doubtless informed that master was out.

But even guessing so much, Holdsworth guessed only half the truth: and it was well, perhaps, that he did not know all, for grief must have mastered his judgment, and forced him into the confession which he prayed, night and morning, for will to

restrain. It was after dark always when Dolly, closely veiled, would creep down the road, with some little bundle under her shawl, for the pawnbroker, that she might obtain a trifle in order to furnish her child with a meal on the morrow. It was in the privacy of her own home that she laboured, as no menial ever *will* labour ; sitting up late, night after night, over the endless task of darning and mending her own and her child's shabby apparel ; often going supperless to bed, and waking to a day even more hopeless than the one that had preceded it.

The devoted man, who would have given his life to win her happiness, knew nothing of all this. Even his little child's dress told him no story, though a woman might have read a full and pathetic narrative of toil and poverty in the frock, turned and



re-turned, mended, and patched, and darned again and again.

Holdsworth seldom saw her now : yet, if ever she caught sight of him at his window, she had always a kindly smile, a grateful nod : and what with the shadow of her hat over her face, and the distance which softened the lines of care, grief, and weariness into the sweet and delicate effect of her beauty, he was ignorant of the serious and withering change that had taken place in her, even during the short time that had elapsed since they had last met and spoken in the High Street.

Nelly came over to him at one o'clock, and he kept her to dinner. The child was hungry, and as he watched her eating, he thought of Dolly.

“Has mamma got a good dinner to-day, darling?”

The little thing looked puzzled; but upon Holdsworth repeating the question, answered "Noo."

He thought she was mistaken, since, after what Conway had told him, the man's first action, he believed, now that he had money in his pocket, would be to attend to his wife's necessities. But though he repeated his question in different shapes, the child invariably answered "Noo, mamma got no din-din."

"No dinner at all! Are you sure, my pet?"

Yes, the child was sure, as sure as a child could be.

Holdsworth sprang up and rang the bell, and entered the passage to await Mrs. Parrot. She came out of her kitchen, and Holdsworth exclaimed, mastering his agitation :

"I want to confer with you, Mrs. Parrot. Nelly tells me that her mamma has no dinner to-day. Is this likely—is this possible, do you think?"

"Indeed, sir, since you ask me, I do then, and God forgi' me for thinkin' the worst," answered Mrs. Parrot.

"But," cried Holdsworth, "I gave Mr. Conway ten pounds this morning, stipulating that he should spend it on his wife and child!"

"He!" exclaimed Mrs. Parrot, almost savagely. "The wretch! ten pounds! he'll spend it all i' liquor! Oh, sir, why didn't you give it to the poor lady?"

"Yes—I ought to have done so," replied Holdsworth, clasping his hands. "But how could I—what excuse *could* I have found for sending it to her? Oh, Mrs. Parrot! something must be done. I can't bear to

think of the poor lady actually dinnerless. What can we contrive? Remember—she is a lady—we must be careful.”

“To think of your lending ten pounds to that villin!” cried Mrs. Parrot, whose mind was staggered by the munificence of the sum and the artfulness of the man in obtaining it. “I niver heerd of such a thing! And was that his reason for callin’? If I’d ha’ only known his object, I’d ha’ sent him packin’ with his blarney, wouldn’t I?”

“What do you advise?” said Holdsworth, eagerly.

“Well, sir, I’m sure I don’t know what to say. She *is* a lady, and it wouldn’t do to send her butchers’ meat across, would it? I’ll tell you what we *could* do, sir; I could kill one o’ my fowls and leave it with my compliments, pretending

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I had killed some yesterday, and wished her, as a neighbour, to taste my fattening."

"That will do! But, instead of killing your fowls, take this half-sovereign and run at once to a poulterer's, and buy a couple of pullets. You can then take them across, and she will suppose they are your own rearing. Will you do this?"

"With the greatest of pleasure, sir; and I'm sure you must have a very kind heart to take so much interest in poor folks."

And Mrs. Parrot ran off for her bonnet, and was presently hurrying down the road with a market-basket on her arm, and her untied bonnet-strings streaming over her shoulders.

Holdsworth waited impatiently for her return, whilst Nelly, who had finished dinner, toddled about the room, gazing with round earnest eyes into the recesses, and the cupboards, and at the shepherds

on the mantelpiece, and the yellow roses on the mat.

In ten minutes' time Mrs. Parrot came back with her face flushed with the heat and exercise, and darted into the house as though she had swept half a jeweller's shop into her basket and was flying for dear life.

"There, sir, what do you think of these?" she exclaimed, dragging a pair of handsomely-floured pullets out of the basket and holding them at arm's length, as though they were a pair of ear-rings. "Aren't they beauties, sir?"

"How can I send them across? Will you take them?"

"Oh yes. I can jest leave 'em at the door wi' Mrs. Parrot's compliments. She'll be sure to guess that they're my rearin', and save me from an untruth, though my

religion is none so fine, thank God, that I should be afeard to tell a kind o' white lie to help any poor creature as wanted."

She then examined the pullets attentively, to make sure that there were no trade-marks upon them in the shape of tickets, adjusted her bonnet, wiped her face, and walked across the road.

Holdsworth waited in the passage until she returned. She was absent a few minutes, and then came back smiling, with the lid of the basket raised to let Holdsworth see that it was empty.

"Did you see Mrs. Conway?"

"No, sir, I wouldn't ask for her," replied Mrs. Parrot, wiping her feet on the doormat. "I jest says to the gal, 'Give this here to your missis with my compliments, and tell her that they're ready for cookin' at once, as they're been killed long enough.'

I niver see any gal look like that wench did when she took the pullets. I thought she'd ha' fainted. She turned as pale as pale, and then she grinned slow-like, and then laughed wi' a sound for all the world like the squeak of a dog that's smotherin' under a cushion. Here's your change, sir. Pullets, six shillin', and one is seven, and two is nine, and two sixpences makes it right. Will you please to count it?"

Holdsworth thanked her, and returned to the sitting-room with a relieved mind. But scarcely was he seated when Mrs. Parrot knocked on the door, and mysteriously beckoned him into the passage.

"I forgot to say, sir, that I ast the gal before coming away if her master was in, and she said 'No.' I says, 'When will he be in? She says, 'I don't know, missis; he went out this mornin', an' he's not been



back since.' Mark what I say, sir!" added Mrs. Parrot, raising an emphatic forefinger, "he'll not give a penny o' that money to his poor wife, but jest keep away from her till he's drunk it all out."

Accompanying which prophecy with many indignant nods, she walked defiantly towards the kitchen.

The idea of Dolly's miserable position, never before impressed upon him as it had been that day, made Holdsworth wretched. He seated himself at the window and stared gloomily and sadly into the road. Nelly came to him and tried to coax him to play with her, but he had no heart even to meet the little creature's sweet entreating eyes with a smile. He caught her up, pressed her to him, and kissed her again and again, while the hot tears rolled down his thin face.

Never before was his impulse to tell Dolly

who he was and snatch her from the misery, the unmeet sorrow that encompassed her, so powerful. Love and pity strove with the dread of dishonouring her by the revelation. Could he endure to think that this delicate, gentle girl was linked to a man who neglected her, who might even ill-treat her, who at that moment might be squandering the money that had been given him on his own gross appetites, without thought of the wife and child wanting bread at home? What must be the issue of such a life if it were permitted to endure? Sooner or later Holdsworth must avow himself to save her and his child from that uttermost degree of ruin and misery to which Conway was dragging them.

He had hoped to devote his life to them. His dream had been that Conway's character was not irretrievably bad, that kindly

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entreaty, cordial advice, and pecuniary help might bring him to a knowledge of his folly and set him once more on the high-road to respectability. Such a redemption would have been Holdsworth's sacrifice; but his own happiness was as nothing in his eyes compared to Dolly's. Faithfully would he have performed his duty to her, nobly would he have vindicated his own most honourable, most exalted devotion, could he have reclaimed this erring man and taught him to give his wife as much happiness as it was possible for a heart that ceaselessly mourned a dead love, to know. Thus he could have been his Dolly's good angel, and whilst God permitted him, have kept watch over her and her child, dead to her belief, but active as the holiest love could make life in his helpful secret guardianship.

He perceived the vanity of that hope now, and yet despairingly clung to it, because, if he surrendered it, he felt that he must confess himself, and from this he shrank as from a deed that would inflict a deeper degradation upon her, while Conway lived, than any she could suffer from her husband's behaviour.

One must either entirely sympathise with his profound susceptibility of the obligation his supposed death had forced upon him to fulfil, or ridicule him as a man absurdly fantastical in his views of morality. There seems no middle standpoint to judge him from.

But unless there be too much austerity in his virtue to make it admirable, then, to properly appreciate it, we must remember the extraordinary tenderness of his nature, his exquisite sensibility, which shrank from

the mere thought of tarnishing the pure honour of the woman he loved.

That he believed her honour would be tarnished were he to proclaim himself in the lifetime of her present husband, was enough; and whether he was right or wrong; whether he was correct in holding the obligations of the marriage service holy, binding, and to be disturbed only at the risk of God's wrath, when incurred with a spotless conscience, when entered upon in innocence and good faith; or whether he should have regarded the marriage-service as a mere civil convention which made his wife his property, claimable by him on the common ground of the law of priority, without reference to any action she might have committed in honest belief that he was dead; one thing we must allow him—an unparalleled quality of unselfishness,

the existence of which, while it attested the sincerity of his views (since he had his heart's deepest affections to lose and nothing to gain by retaining them), elevated his conduct to the highest point of heroism.

Nelly had never before found him unwilling to romp with her; when he raised his head she watched his face with a strange, wistful look, and putting her finger to his cheek, said :

“Why do 'oo cry?”

He forced a smile for answer, caressed her, and then placed her on the ground, thinking she was weary of sitting. But she climbed upon his knee again, and repeated her question with great earnestness :

“Why do 'oo cry?”

“Because I am silly and weak, my little one. I am forgetting that there is a good

and just God over me, who will hear my prayers and help me, as He before did, when I was alone on the wide sea."

He said this aloud, but spoke rather to himself than to the child.

"Dod loves Nelly," said the little thing, "and Nelly loves 'oo. Nelly kiss 'oo."

That was all the comfort she could give him; but it fell tenderly on his ear. He kissed her gratefully, rocking her gently to and fro in his arms with his eyes on her face. She soon, however, rebelled against an attitude which crippled her limbs, and slipped on to the floor, and to amuse her he gave her a book with pictures in it, which she examined gravely, talking to herself as little children and aged people do.

In this manner the afternoon passed; but never was Holdsworth more depressed,

more restless, filled with more nameless anxieties and misgivings.

Apart from all moral considerations, his future was terribly uncertain.

Suppose the Conways left the town? He must follow them, for he could not bear the separation; and what would they think of his pursuit? Suppose all his efforts to obtain a living failed, what should he do?

At five o'clock Mrs. Parrot came in to put on Nelly's hat: that was the regular hour at which the little girl was sent home by Holdsworth.

"My apron is dirty," said the worthy woman, "so I'll not go across with you, my dear. But I'll watch from the porch until I see you safe in."

So, receiving a kiss and a piece of gingerbread from Holdsworth, the child toddled



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into the road, and when she was inside the gate, where her mother would see her, Mrs. Parrot closed the door and went back to her ironing in the kitchen.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE KNOT IS CUT.

A storm broke over Hanwitch that night and left behind it a strong wind which swept up great masses of clouds; and the morning sunshine streamed and darkened in quick alternations, and made the air lively with the movement of shadow.

Holdsworth, deeply disturbed by conflicting anxieties, had slept but little, and at eight o'clock left his bed and started for a walk before breakfast, hoping that the breeze which thundered about the house would freshen and inspirit him.

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Gaining the High Street, he turned to the left and walked along a narrow pathway that took him through the fields to Maldon Heights, as the hill that overlooked Hantwich was called. He climbed the grassy slope and stood awhile on the summit, drinking in the hooting wind and watching the fluctuating scene that ran from his feet to the horizon. The oats and barley in many fields were not yet cut ; and it was a sight to see them breaking into wide spaces of delicate gold under the sun and growing gray again as the cloud-shadows sailed over them. When the sunshine lingered awhile, these fields seemed to reflect the shadows which had passed, for the wind rushed like a dark arm along them, and pressed the graceful grain into the likeness of a wave, which swept forwards with swiftness, making the fields dark where it ran. The

farther trees appeared to hold steady under the breeze; but there were nearer trees which swayed their branches in wild gesticulations of entreaty, and flogged the wind as it roared among them, bearing away trophies of green leaves and broken twigs. The birds breasted the gale with short flights, or turned and yielded to the invisible power with small cries. Every object the eye rested on appeared in motion, so lively was the effect of the cloud shadows upon the houses and the weight of the wind upon the surrounding country.

It was a morning to clear the most hypochondriacal mind of despondency, and Holdsworth felt its cheerful influence as he stood exposed to the swinging rush of warm air, and watched nature dancing to the tunes sung by the wind as it swept through the sky.

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He had made up his mind to call at the brewery that morning, and he took a look at it as he passed the street in which it stood on his way home. The gaol-like building, with the steam about its windows resembling rich London fog, which refused either to stop in or go away, was scarcely calculated to improve his hopes. Big beef-faced men in aprons rolled huge casks out of a courtyard into a cellar filled with sawdust, damp, and gloom; the throb of the engine could be heard distinctly, and the wind that blew out of the street came in agitated, disordered puffs, as though the smell of the beer had made it rather drunk.

Holdsworth shook his head as he passed on. It struck him that there would be little chance of his getting employment in that steaming, panting, perspiring quarter; and that he would be acting more wisely

if, instead of challenging rudeness by personal inquiries at places where nobody wanted him, he spent a few shillings in advertising for a situation.

Determining to do this, he made what haste he could back to his lodgings, meaning there and then to manufacture an advertisement.

He entered his sitting-room, rang the bell to let Mrs. Parrot know he had returned, and sat himself down to consider the terms in which he should make his wants known.

"What would you like for breakfast, sir?" said Mrs. Parrot, opening the door.

"Oh, anything you please. A new-laid egg if you can find me one."

"Yes, sir. I took four beauties out just now. Have you heard the news, sir?"

"No. What news?"

"Well, sir, it's what I allus thought must happen; and day after day I've bin expectin' it, as mother 'll bear me out. They've got the brokers in at the Conways."

"The brokers!" exclaimed Holdsworth, turning round in his chair quickly.

"Yes, sir. Their gal told the milkman just now, as giv' me the news. And what's wuss—leastways some might call it wuss, though I should consider it a good job myself if I was his wife—Mr. Conway hasn't been home all night!"

"The villain!" exclaimed Holdsworth through his teeth. And then he jumped up and began to pace the room excitedly.

"Stop!" he cried, observing that Mrs. Parrot was about to withdraw, "Are you sure this news is true?"

"Oh, I've no doubt of it, sir. When

the milkman told me, I was jest goin' to run across and see the poor lady, and then I says to myself, 'What use can I be to her?'"

"I may be of some use, though," interrupted Holdsworth. "Never mind about my breakfast just yet. When did the man enter the house to take possession?"

"Last night, sir, the gal told the milkman."

"Great heaven! And has she been alone all night?" He stopped short, seized his hat, and, brushing past Mrs. Conway, went quickly out of the house.

Mrs. Parrot watched him from the porch, lost in amazement.

He pushed open the gate, marched up to the door, and knocked loudly. His mood was one of deep excitement. The sense of the crushing misery that had



fallen upon Dolly had given a poignancy to feeling that set all self-control at defiance.

The door was opened by the servant, and out with her came a smell of strong tobacco smoke.

"Is Mr. Conway in?"

"No, sir, he ain't," answered the girl, looking behind her and then at Holdsworth, with a scared face.

"Where's your mistress?"

"In the parlour, sir."

"I should like to see her."

"She's not visible. She's in grief, and ain't to be seen."

"Go and tell her that Mr. Hampden has called and would like to say a word to her."

"I don't think—"

"Do what I tell you!" exclaimed Holdsworth.

The girl slouched backwards and pushed her head into the parlour-door.

"She ain't here. She's gone upstairs," said she, and upstairs she went, slapping the staircase with her shoes as she went.

An individual with a round red face, a white hat, a spotted shawl, a coat nearly to his ankles, a long waistcoat, and a black clay pipe in his mouth, lounged elegantly out of the room which Mr. Conway had called his "Surgery" at the end of the passage, and leaning collectedly against the door, nodded familiarly to Holdsworth, took his pipe from his mouth, expectorated, and said "Morning."

"Good morning. Are you the man in possession?" replied Holdsworth.

The individual nodded and replaced his pipe.

"When did you come?"

"Last night," answered the man in a thick voice. "And a werry queer look-out it is. Blowed if they've got any butter in this house?"

"What is the amount of the debt?"

"Twenty-three pun four and seven pence," said the man, removing his pipe to expectorate again. "Are you a creditor?"

"No," answered Holdsworth, listening for Dolly's footsteps.

"Then if you vent on your bended knees for gratitood you wouldn't be over-doin' it," said the man, giving Holdsworth a sagacious nod. "There ain't above ten pound in the house, and not that. Cast yer eye into that parler. The best of the goods is there, and if you can make three pound out of 'em, I'll swaller my pipe."

And then an idea smiting him :

"You ain't come to have a tooth drawed, have yer?"

"No."

"Vot's your opinion of tooth-drawin'?" inquired the man confidentially, retiring and reappearing again, holding up a pair of forceps. "Ain't it rayther a queer go, don't you think? I knew a barber as drawed teeth. He never used nothing of this kind. Vot do you think he did? Bust me if he doesn't set you in a chair, fastens a bit o' vire to the tooth as is to come out, and ties t'other end of the vire to the leg of a table. Ven all's ready, 'Mind yer eye' he sings out, ups with a razor, rushes at yer makin' horrible mouths, up jumps you, avays you run, and leaves your tooth behind yer!"

He gargled an asthmatical laugh, adding :  
"That's vot I call a sensible vay of drawin'

a tooth ; no bits of cold iron shoved into yer mouth as if yer tongue vas hair and wanted curling."

"Please, sir, will you step into the parlour and sit down," said the girl, thrusting her head over the banisters and calling to Holdsworth. "Missis 'll be with yer in a minute."

He entered the wretched little parlour, while the "man in possession" retreated to the surgery arm-chair, and sat severely contemplating some unfinished teeth on the table in front of him.

In a few moments Holdsworth heard footsteps outside, and Dolly came in, holding Nelly's hand. She was terribly pale, with a look of terror and exhaustion on her face painful to see. There was an unnatural sleepless brilliancy in her eyes that heightened her worn, hopeless expression.

She had thrown an old shawl over her shoulders, and through the portion of the fair skin of the neck that was exposed the veins showed dark. The hand she gave to Holdsworth was like a stone.

He was so overcome by the sight of her misery, that for some moments he could not speak. The child came up to him and rubbed her cheek against his hand.

"This is kind, very kind of you, Mr. Hampden," she exclaimed in a low, faint voice, sinking upon the sofa and shivering as she hugged the shawl about her shoulders.

"You are in great distress, I fear. I only heard the news just now. I came over to you at once," he answered tremulously, the fierce beating of his heart sounding an echo through his voice.

"It is what I have been daily expecting

for many months—for many bitter, cruel months!” she exclaimed. “It has come at last. We are homeless now. And my husband, who ought to be at my side, has left me. He was away all day yesterday and last night. Oh God! what a night it has been!” she moaned, rocking herself to and fro.

“Don’t say you are homeless,” he cried; “you have a friend. Let me be your friend. Mrs. Parrot shall give you a home for the present . . . if you will accept it.”

She looked at him with stupefied eyes as one who doubts her senses, then said: “We have no claim upon you. Oh! how noble-hearted! Nelly, Nelly, come to me, come to me!”

The child ran to her mother, and, being frightened by the passionate despair in her voice, hid her face in her lap and burst into

tears. But Dolly's eyes remained dry—lost nothing of their wild brilliancy. She dragged her child to her, and swayed to and fro with tearless sobs that shook and convulsed her.

“I have deserved this,” she presently moaned. “I was faithless to the truest love God ever blessed a woman with. Why was he taken from me? My child was starving, and the sight of her wasted body drove me mad with grief. I never loved Mr. Conway—he knew it . . . He has left me! Oh! he is a coward to leave me! What am I to do? I am a lonely woman—I have this child to feed and clothe—I have not a relative to turn to—and now we are homeless! Oh God! this is too much, too much!”

She hid her face in her child's hair.

Nothing but the dread that the truth, at



that moment, might kill her to hear, prevented him, as he listened to her heart-broken words, from kneeling to her and calling her wife. He watched her with a strange steadfastness of gaze, and with a face more bloodless than hers. The impulse to avow himself had recoiled and driven the blood to his heart ; a faintness overcame him, but he battled with the deadly weakness, and the better to do so, rose and strode across the room and stood near his wife and child, looking down upon them.

“I will help you to the utmost of my power,” he said, speaking slowly, and with a difficulty that presently passed. “Whilst I live, neither you nor your child will be friendless. Trust me, and make me happy by knowing me to be your friend.”

She raised her feverishly-lighted eyes,

and said in a quick, febrile whisper : " You cannot take the burden of the three of us upon yourself."

" No ! I would not raise a finger to serve your husband now. He has money, but he left you in want all day yesterday, and you have been alone through the night . . . But I will befriend you and your child. Whatever I can do shall be done. I am not rich—I would to God I were, for your sake. Were I to pay this debt, I should only delay the loss of your furniture for a few days; others would come, and I should not have the money to deal with them."

" What am I to do ? " she wailed, clinging to her child.

" Mrs. Parrot's house will be your home for the present. We must wait until we get news of Mr. Conway."

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"Oh, Mr. Hampden, is he not cruel to have left me in this position! No one knows but God what I have endured during the last year! When I was battling with poverty alone I was happier and richer. My memories were fresh and pure, my conscience was clear, but I sacrificed them for Nelly's sake, and now I am deserted and the most miserable woman in the whole world!"

She broke into a long piteous cry, but no tears came into her eyes.

"Let me take you at once from this wretched home. Come!"

He went to the door and held it open. Dolly stared around her like a sleeper suddenly aroused, and then rose with the child in her arms. Holdsworth called to the servant and told her to fetch her mistress's hat. The "man in possession"

louched out of the back room and stared with a dry smile.

“Goin’?” he asked.

Holdsworth did not answer him. The weight of the child was too great for the half-fainting mother, who tottered as she stood. Holdsworth took Nelly from her and placed her on the ground.

“You ain’t a goin’, missis, are yer?” said the servant, handing Dolly the hat, and whimpering.

“Yes,” replied Holdsworth; “and if Mr. Conway should call, tell him that his wife is at Mrs. Parrot’s.”

“Oh, mum, I don’t like to be left alone with that man!” cried the servant, looking down the passage.

“Vy not?” said the man. “If you’re all goin’, who’s to cook my wittles, I should like to know?”

"I'll not stop!" exclaimed the girl.  
"I wouldn't trust myself anear him."

"You're free to stop or go, as you please," said Holdsworth, giving her some money.

"Then I ain't to be paid out arter all?" exclaimed the man, striking a match, and holding it flaming in one hand and his pipe in the other.

"Not by me," answered Holdsworth, opening the hall-door.

He took Nelly's hand and gave Dolly his arm. She drew a long quivering sob as she passed through the garden; and then, seeing some inquisitive faces staring over the wire-blinds in the opposite house, hung her head and stepped out quickly.

Mrs. Parrot hearing them come in, ran out of the kitchen, and stood looking from one to the other of them in mute astonishment.

"Mrs. Conway will make a temporary home of your house, Mrs. Parrot," said Holdsworth. "You will kindly prepare a bed-room for her and Miss Nelly, and place your drawing-room at her disposal."

Dolly had sunk into a chair. He poured out some wine and held it to her, but she waved it away, striving to suppress her sobs.

"Oh, ma'am, pray don't take on so," cried Mrs. Parrot, going up to her. "Things'll come right, ma'am. You'll be heasy an' comfortable here."

Holdsworth knelt on a chair beside her, holding the wine. Oh, it was hard that he could not take her to his heart and whisper the word that would change all her anguish into joy. But if ever the barrier that was raised between them had

been felt, it was felt by him then. Her honour now, more than ever it had been, was become peculiarly his care. The sense of her being another's, that his own claims were as naught in the presence of her belief that she was Conway's wife, was never before so sharply felt. Her misery had given her in his eyes a sanctity that made his yearning love sacrilegious. Humility conquered emotion, and he crept away from her side, and stood looking at her from a distance, holding Nelly's hand.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Parrot's fingers were busy with Dolly's hat strings and the shawl over her shoulders, and she murmured incessantly all manner of kindly sentences, of which their extreme triteness as consolatory axioms was greatly qualified by her motherly manner.

"There, my dear," she exclaimed, laying the hat upon the table, "drink a little wine: you'll be better presently. Life's full o' troubles, God knows! and there are husbands in this world as is enough to make a woman forget her sect and strike 'em. But a friend, ma'am, is as good as sunshine to a frost-bitten man, and I'm sure you've got a good and kind one in Mr. Hampden."

"It's my husband's desertion," cried Dolly, "that I think of. I don't mind the loss of my home. But to think of *his* deserting me and my little one when he *could* not know that I had a friend—when I married him for Nelly's sake, to get her bread. Yes, Mrs. Parrot, to save her from starving. And to feel that I defied my conscience only to be brought so low—so low!"



“God forbid, my dear, that iver *I* should set husband an’ wife agin’ each other,” replied Mrs. Parrot, glancing at Holdsworth, to see how he might relish her remark; “but I *must* say that, if Mr. Conway’s left yer, it’s a good thing, an’ the last thing on this airth as would trouble me if I was you. You’ve gone through a deal o’ sufferin’ for him, an’ if he’s desairted you, you can’t come to worse harm nor was he to have stood by his home like a man, which he niver was; and there’s not one o’ your neighbours as don’t know that you’ve had more trouble than any Christian woman i’ this world ought to have. And it may sound a hard sayin’, but if he’s gone,” she exclaimed, looking defiantly at Holdsworth, “I hope and pray it’s for good an’ all.”

It often happens in real life, as in books,

that a closing remark will take a weird appropriateness by the sudden confrontment of the fact of which it is only the shadow. Mrs. Parrot had barely shut her mouth when the passage echoed with the clattering of the knocker on the house-door. Never was such a delirious knocking. Mrs. Parrot turned pale, persuaded that Mr. Conway had come home drunk, and had reeled across to her house to demand his wife and create a horrible "scene."

Dolly raised her head, and it was plain that the same idea had occurred to her, by the indescribable expression of mingled hate, fear, and loathing that entered her face.

Mrs. Parrot giving her moral organisation a twist, ran out. Scarcely had she opened the door when in burst Martha, the servant from over the way.

“Oh, missis! oh, missis!” she screeched, “what do you think? Master’s drowned! Oh Lord! Where’s Mrs. Conway? He’s dead an’ gone! Here’s the gent as brought the noos. Oh, sir, please tell the missis here!”

She turned, and in her excitement caught hold of the sleeve of a little stout man who stood behind, and literally dragged him forward.

“Let go, you fool! What are you a doing of? Are you Mrs. Conway?” he asked of Mrs. Parrot, who stood staring with wide-open eyes, grasping her dress as if she were only waiting to take a deep breath before tearing herself in two.

“No, she ain’t! This ain’t Mrs. Conway!” cried the excited Martha.

“You told me she was here!” exclaimed the man.

“So she is ; ain’t she, missis ?”

“Great ’iven ! what a clatterin’ !” cried Mrs. Parrot, recovering her tongue. “What is it you’ve got to say, sir ?”

“Why, this,” answered the little man, who was evidently a very irritable little man—“Mr. Conway’s body was found in the river this morning at a quarter before seven, and he’s lying now in the Town Hall, and I’ve come to give the news ; and curse me if ever I’ll undertake such a job again, if I am to be mauled about by such a fool as this when I’m out of breath, and fit to drop with perspiration.”

“Mrs. Parrot ! Mrs. Parrot !” called Holdsworth.

The half-distracted woman ran into the sitting-room, where the first thing she saw was Dolly in a dead faint, lying upon the sofa, with Holdsworth kneeling by her side.

"She overheard your voices!" he exclaimed, turning up a face as white as death. "Pray God the shock may not kill her. Look to her, Mrs. Parrot, I *must* speak to the man outside."

He jumped up and left the room, and found the little irritable man in the act of walking away.

"I beg your pardon. One moment!" he cried, running out after him. "Pray excuse my agitation—you have brought shocking news. Is it *indeed* true?"

The little man turned and took in Holdsworth from head to foot, and answered: "It is true, sir. I've seen the body myself. It's in the Town Hall. He's been in the water all night, the doctor says."

"All night?"

"He was found by a man named Williamson. They all knew who he was when

they saw him. He must have been drunk when he fell into the water, for the path was wide enough for a horse and cart. Dr. Tanner asked me to step round with the news as he heard I was coming this way. Good morning."

The little man nodded and walked away. Had Dolly been a rich man's wife, a sympathetic deputation, introduced by the churchwardens, might have made a procession to her house to break the news gently, but how can you expect sympathy for the wife of a man who dies owing everybody money?

Holdsworth was stunned, and stood for some moments staring idly from the porch. He then returned hastily to Dolly's side.

"She's comin' to, sir," said Mrs. Parrot slapping the poor girl's hand, and expending what breath she had upon the cold white

forehead. "What awful noos, sir? . . . Conway dead! I can't believe it. And drowned, too! Oh, poor wretch!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Holdsworth.

Dolly had opened her eyes, and was staring blindly at him. He moistened his handkerchief with water on the sideboard and pressed it to her head. Nelly stood at the window gazing at her mother with a look of wistful fear in her face. At the door was Martha's countenance, seamed with lines of perspiration, her mouth open, and her hair hanging like a string of young carrots over her forehead.

"I feel very weak," muttered Dolly, striving to sit upright, but falling back.

"Something terrible has happened. Ah! Robert is dead!"

The memory rushed upon her like a spasm, and she spoke in a cry.

"Come, my dear, don't try to speak yet," said Mrs. Parrot.

"Where is Nelly?"

Holdsworth led the child to the sofa. The mother looked at her little girl, opened her arms, and burst into tears.

"Thank God for that?" said Holdsworth, turning away. Watching her face as her consciousness had dawned, he had felt that, if tears did not relieve her, her heart would break.



## CHAPTER IX.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE little irritable man had brought true news. The report was all over the town: everybody was talking of Conway's death. A woman living in the road called upon Mrs. Parrot to give her the story, not knowing that Mrs. Conway was within. Her husband had met Williamson, the man who found Conway, and had got the account from him clear of all exaggeration.

It was just this: Williamson was a carpenter, and was walking to Thorrold Marsh

to execute a repairing job at a house there. He was this side of Hanwitch' just by the bridge facing Squire Markwell's place, when he saw a human hand sticking out of the water. He peered and saw a man lying on his back, the water half a foot above his face, showing the drowned figure as plainly as if it were under glass. Williamson pulls off his coat, tucks up his shirt-sleeves, catches hold of the hand, and up comes the body like a cork. The moment he had the body ashore he knew who it was; left his bag of tools on the bank, and ran as hard as his legs would carry him into the town to give the alarm. The inspector and two constables, and a couple of men with a stretcher belonging to the Town Hall, start out of the High Street and are conducted by Williamson to the body. A

crowd gathers about the tail of the procession, the body is put on the stretcher, covered up, and carried to the Town Hall in the sight of a multitude large enough to diffuse the news through the length and breadth of Hanwitch in ten minutes.

So dead Mr. Conway was, if ever a man was dead in this world; and now, the woman told Mrs. Parrot, people were only waiting for the coroner's inquest, to learn how he came by his death.

But the verdict, however it might run, would be inconclusive, since there were no witnesses to show how Conway fell into the water. But this much was known; that yesterday Conway had called at the "Three Stars" and ordered a fine dinner to be got ready for him, with champagne and the best of wines; and to let the landlord understand that he meant what

he said, he pulled out a handful of sovereigns and let them fall into his pocket again, chink! chink! When dinner was done, he left the house intoxicated, and what became of him the "Three Stars" didn't know; but the "Pine Apple" did, for he came there in the afternoon and squeezed himself behind the bar, made love to the barmaid, drank some tumblers of rum, and got into an abusive argument with an ostler, whose eye he threatened to blacken if he contradicted him again. On which he was turned out.

That was his day's history, so far as it was recorded in human knowledge. The rest could be guessed; and the public were not slow in explaining their theories. Of course he was drunk, had rolled into the water, and was too senseless to get

out again, though the water where he lay was not above two and a half feet deep.

Nobody cared twopence about his death. It gave the shop-people something to talk about until customers dropped in, and then it was, "What's the next article?" and Conway was forgotten. When a bubble explodes upon the surface of a stream, nothing mourns. The tide rolls on just the same, with sunshine or darkness in its breast, as the case may be; the pikes lose no jot of their voracity, and gudgeons swim into their maws; the minnows jump at the flies. Shall law, commerce, or anything else stop because a drunkard is drowned? Cover him up; let him hide his face until the pale jury come to take a peep; then pop him out of sight in a hole, and get back as fast as we may to dinner.

But there were two persons on whose destiny this man's death was to exercise an influence as wonderful, and gracious, and beneficial as though, instead of a dead drunkard, he was a good spirit—an angel charged with a mission of love, sent by God Himself to work out and complete the happiness of the man who had been heavily tried, but who, in his bitterest trial, had never been found wanting.

And I truly think that for such men—men who in their sorrow reverentially bow their heads and say, “God knows, I believe in him; He shall lead me as a little child”—who murmur not, but, praising their Heavenly Father always, make their actions a profound heroism by obeying His voice in all seasons, not more faithfully in moments of joy than in moments of

anguish—for such men we shall seldom err in prophesying a time in their lives when the heat of the day shall be shaded from them, and their burden and their conflict removed. “O man, greatly beloved, go thou thy way till the end, for thou shalt rest and stand in thy lot at the end of thy days.”

Dolly had asked to be left alone with her child. Deeming Holdsworth a stranger, she had felt the restraint of his presence upon her, deeply as she was moved by his goodness. Her heart ached: misery had mastered her. The mere sense of having found a friend in this her time of piteous need could not suffice her. More was imperative: communion with God, communion with the husband who, she believed, looked down upon her from Heaven. To no mortal eyes could she

lay bare the exquisite grief that lacerated her heart ; and though she should find no comfort even in the Heaven she turned to, yet her full and poignant misery demanded escape in words and tears, and she asked to be left alone.

Holdsworth entered the room facing his own apartment. This was Mrs. Parrot's drawing-room. Here she had a piano ; here she had some wonderful stuffed birds under glass shades ; here she herself sat on Sundays with her mother, when her house was unoccupied.

He struggled to calm himself, that he might master and appreciate all the significance of the position in which he was placed by the sudden death of Conway. But his moods were wild and hurrying ; the play of emotion was quick and painful. He saw his wife in her grief ; he saw her



wrestling, with no eye but her child's upon her, with the anguish that filled her; he felt her loneliness: he felt the cruel hopelessness that weighed in her heart as lead; he felt, above all, the dreadful sense of degradation which must attend her reflections upon the death of her husband, Conway; upon the wretched, miserable life she had led with him; upon the complete and bitter reversal of the sole end for which she had married him.

The barrier that divided them was gone. Could there be any scruple now to hold him back from her? If there yet lingered one feeling of delicacy to prompt him to delay his confession for a little, until the dead was buried, until something of the horror of the sudden death had yielded to time, should it not be removed by the knowledge of her misery, which he had

it in his power to dissipate and turn to gladness. Why should she weep? Why should she feel one instant of pain when he could change her tears to smiles, her grief to joy?

He stole to the door of the room she was in and listened. He heard her sobbing, and that sound vanquished his last hesitation.

He turned the handle gently and entered. She was on her knees beside the sofa, her arms twined about Nelly, her face buried in the child's lap. She started, looked at him, and rose slowly to her feet. He approached and stood before her.

"Will you not trust me as a friend?" he said, in a voice a little above a whisper.

She tried to answer him, but her sobs choked her voice. He seated himself and

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took Nelly on his knee, and, whilst he smoothed the child's hair, continued :  
“ There is hope, there is comfort for you and this little one. Check your sobs and listen to me. I can give you comfort, for I have known what it is to lose one that is dearer to me than my heart's blood, to lose her and to find her again. She was my wife, and I left her to go to sea. The ship I sailed in was wrecked, and for many days I lay consumed with hunger and thirst in an open boat, seeing miserable creatures like myself dying around me one by one. And when I was rescued my memory was gone ; I could not remember my own name, my home, the wife I had left, the country I had sailed from. But the voice of God one day directed me to leave Australia and go to England. I reached London, and

there a man spoke to me of Hanwitch, a name familiar and dear to me for my wife's sake. And when I came to Southbourne, the beloved old village gave me back my memory. I knew whom I had come to seek, and what I had lost. They told me that my wife thought me dead, and was married and lived with my child here—in this road—in that house yonder! Oh Dolly! oh wife!”

Her sweet sad face, as he continued speaking, had been slowly upturning to his, and, when their eyes met, he put the little child upon the floor and stretched out his arms, crying, “Oh Dolly! oh wife!”

But she!

There was a look of petrification, stranger and more awful even than death, upon her face; her eyes glared, her lips were parted:

and to have seen her thus stirless, thus white, thus staring, thus breathless, you would have said that she was dead, even as she sat there.

Then the life leaped into her, she started from the sofa with a loud hysterical laugh, and flung herself on her knees before him, crying, "John ! John !"

"Dolly !"

"John ! John !" she repeated ; and she brought his hand to her eyes, and stared at it ; and then grasped his knees and raised her face to his, talking to herself in hurried, inaudible whispers, and fixing a piercing gaze upon him.

"John ! John !" she cried out again.

He put his arms around her and would have pressed her to his heart, but she kept herself away with her hand against

his breast, preserving that keen, unwinking, steadfast, wonderful gaze.

“Do you not know me, Dolly?” he cried. “Look at me closely; hear my voice! hear me tell you of the old dear times! We were to meet in the summer, do you remember, Dolly? and we were never more to part; and you were to keep a calendar and mark off the days. Oh God! what weary days—what endless days to both of us! And do you remember the walks we took the day before we parted, down by the river, where I sat and cried in your arms because the sight of your sorrow broke me down and I had no more comfort to give you?”

But still she would not let him clasp her. Still she kept her hand pressed against him, and her eyes, now growing wild and unreal with fear, upon his face.

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“Oh God!” he cried in his agony. “Will she not know me? Has my secret come upon her too suddenly? Darling! darling! I could not see your tears, I could not hear your sobs, I could not feel the desolation and misery that was breaking your heart, and still keep myself hidden from you. Oh, bitter has the trial been to watch you—to know you to be mine—to see my little child—and to be as a stranger to you! Call me John! Call me husband! Speak to me, Dolly! Tell me that no change that pain and suffering have made in me can disguise me from your love!”

She released herself from his arms and sprang a yard away from him; and there, as she stood transfixed, watching him with large, steady eyes, her dishevelled hair about her forehead, her hands clenched,

and her head inclined forward, she looked like a marble figure of madness, her habiliments carven to the life.

She had thought him dead. For many, many months she had prayed to him as one in Heaven. Did she know him now? Yes, but as a dead man might be known—with unspeakable fear and unspeakable love; with the horror of superstition and the passion of deep affection.

Thus they stood for awhile, their eyes fixed on each other: then a heavy sigh broke from him; he turned to his child.

“Nelly, my little one, come to me! I am thy father!”

He extended his arms. The action and words broke the spell. With an indescribable cry Dolly fled to him.

“John! John!” she murmured. “My husband—my very own! Come back to



me from the dead ! Come back to me after all this cruel waiting ! ”

And then she broke from him again, and watched him yet again from a distance, then ran and flung her arms around his neck, crying, “ John ! John ! Why did you not come to me before ! why did you not come to me before ! ”

The hot tears were streaming down his cheeks now : he held her tightly, saying, in broken tones :

“ We are together—never more to part. I am thy very husband ! I have loved thee always ! Oh God be praised, the merciful God be praised for this ? ”

“ Nelly, Nelly ! ” she cried ; and she ran from him and seized her child, and held her up.

“ She is ours, John ! our little one ! We have found papa, Nelly ! There he is !

There is Nelly's papa! God has given him back to us—we were broken-hearted just now . . . Oh husband! . . . husband!"

She broke down; a dangerous excitement had up to this moment sustained her. She sank into a weeping, sobbing, fainting woman in a moment; but his arms received her, his breast pillowed her, and there she rested for many minutes, with no sound to break the holy silence that filled the room but his deep quivering sobs.

When we peep at them again, a half-hour has passed, and the wife is seated near the husband with her arm around him; and the child is on her father's knee. The fear that threw a film upon the exquisite emotions of the girl has passed; she is listening to his story, interrupting

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him often with quick exclamations of distress, then fondling him and listening again, vibrating with eagerness, with love, with amazement, which makes her pale face kaleidoscopic with expression. He is telling her of his sufferings in the boat, of his rescue, of his friends in Australia, of his return to England, of his arrival at Southbourne ; and as she hears him tell the story of his noble unselfishness—how, to save her from the sorrow and the shame that must have attended his disclosure, if made while Conway lived, he held his secret, but could not keep his love from going forth to his child—she knows that he has brought back to her the same grand heart he took with him five years ago ; the same magnanimous qualities ; the same pure impulses ; the same heroical capacity of self-sacrifice.

And then she tells him her story ; and now it is for him to soothe her with the love that has transformed his face and made it beautiful with a deeper and subtler beauty than it had ever before worn. For, as she recurs to those piteous times of her distress, her tears gush forth afresh and her eyes grow wild, as though she did not believe in the happiness that had come to her at last.

I see them sitting in that room while the bright morning sunshine pours upon the window and floods the floor with its radiance ; I hear the birds singing merrily in the garden, and the cosy chucking of the hens and the sound of the fresh sweet wind as it sweeps through the pear-trees and sends the red-edged leaves rustling to the ground.

I see the child's large deep eyes wander-

ing from father to mother, from mother to father, with the small face busy with the unformed consciousness that struggles in it.

I see the mother careworn and pale, but with the light of rapture on her face that discloses all its secret sweetness, watching, ever watching, with soft eyes shining with happy tears, the dear one whose arm is around her.

I see Holdsworth with the patches of grey upon his hair, his sunken cheeks and bowed figure symbolising while his life shall hold the unspeakable sufferings of mind and body he has known since we first beheld him. I see him, with the calmness of perfect joy mellowing his eyes, and enriching his face with a colour that owes its lustre to the spirit, so that it shall be there in darkness and in sunshine, holding his wife to his heart, often pressing

his lips to his child, often glancing upwards with looks of ineffable gratitude; and I think of those two lines which Goldsmith says are worth a million :

*“I have been young, and now am old :  
yet never saw I the righteous man forsaken,  
nor his seed begging their bread.”*

\* \* \* \*

A knock falls upon the door; the door is opened, and enter Mrs. Parrot. Does she start dramatically? I promise you there is more genuine astonishment conveyed by the little jump she gives, as she falls back a step and then stands staring, than in any movement designed to express wonderment you will see performed on the stage.

So the mystery is solved, is it? So her lodger isn't a gentleman after all, but an insidious man who, under pretence of

liking Nelly's company, has been paying attention to mamma! and now, with Conway's body lying in the Town Hall, dead only a few hours, is actually caressing the widow in Mrs. Parrot's respectable house!

Holdsworth and Dolly exchange glances, and Dolly hangs her head with a look of confusion on her face (and well she may, thinks Mrs. Parrot) as Holdsworth puts Nelly down and rises.

"I am really sorry to introod," says Mrs. Parrot haughtily, "but my motive for knockin', sir, was to inquire when you would like your breakfast sarved?"

"We'll talk of that in a moment," answers Holdsworth. "I have something to say to you. This lady is my wife!"

"I beg your parding," says Mrs. Parrot, growing very pale.

"My wife, Mrs. Parrot. You have

heard of Mr. Holdsworth who went to sea and was drowned? He was not drowned. I am Mr. Holdsworth!"

"You!"

She tottered, ran forward, grasped the table, and shrieked, "You!"

"Yes, Mrs. Parrot," exclaimed Dolly, "this is John—my own darling husband, whom I thought was dead."

"And do you mean to say, sir," gasped Mrs. Parrot hysterically, "that you knew who you was yourself all the time?"

"All the time that I have lodged with you."

"An' you've seen your lawful wife day arter day without speakin' of it, or sayin' who you was?"

"Yes."

"Because," stammered Mrs. Parrot, still clinging to the table, "because you says



that a wife can't have two husbands, and so you hid yourself that you might spare her feelin's?"

"Yes, that is why, Mrs. Parrot," cried Dolly.

Mrs. Parrot took a deep breath, and then, to the amazement of the others, burst into tears.

"Oh, sir, I can't help it," she sobbed. "I niver did hear in all my life of such beautiful conduct. Niver . . . And is this your child? . . . Why of' course it is! Oh dear! who'd ha' thought that any mortal man could ha' acted so nobly! Oh, sir, let me shake your hand."

She not only shook his hand, but actually fell against him and kissed him; and then, overwhelmed with her effrontery and her feelings, was rushing out of the room, when Holdsworth stopped her.

“One moment, dear Mrs. Parrot. You are the only person in Hanwitch—in the world I may say—who knows our secret. Will you keep it? We have many reasons for not wishing it known.”

“I will, sir, I promise you,” blubbered the honest woman, “since you ask me; but if it wasn’t for that I’d go and spread the noos everywhere, I would, for I niver heerd of such beautiful conduct before, niver, in sarmons or anywheers else; and it ’ud be the makin’ of many a man to be told of it. God bless you both, I’m sure. God bless you, little gal. You’ve found a good father—a rare good father!”

And out she ran choking.

So the curtain falls, for the end has come. No need to raise it again, for you who have sat so kindly and patiently

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through this little drama must know as well as I what will become of the two chief characters and their little one when they have made their bow and withdrawn. Australia is before them, with generous friends to welcome them to their new home, and listen with interest and tenderness to their strange story of bitter separation, and sweet and sacred reunion.

Enough has been written; the quill that has driven these creations to this point is but a stump; the hand that holds it is tired; the companionship of the shadows which have kept me company is broken. What fitter time, then, than now to say good-bye?

THE END.



## POSTSCRIPT.

I must claim the reader's indulgence while I speak for a moment of that portion of the foregoing narrative which refers to the hero's loss of memory.

That loss of memory has been brought about by trials and sufferings such as I have attempted to depict in the early chapters of this narrative, is too certain to make it necessary that I should adduce instances (which are very readily procured) as proof. That such loss has lasted, not for months only, but for years, will be seen by the following anecdote, which

suggested this story, and which I extract from the *Noon Gazette* of July, 1772 :—

“Last Sunday died at Winchelsea a character of whom a correspondent, a gentleman distinguished both by his parts and benevolence, has obligingly furnished us with the following account: That his name was *William Stephens*, and that he was a mariner, who, many years since, was pressed from his home to serve on board His Majesty’s ship of war *The Vapour*; that he was then married but two weeks; that whilst cruising off the Portugal coast *The Vapour* was wrecked, and *Stephens*, with some others, saved his life by clinging to a portion of the wreck, in which condition they languished near three days, and were then rescued by a French merchantman, who carried them into *Bordeau* (*sic*): that on *Stephens* being

questioned, he was found to have lost his memory, on which he was sent into England, and was hired as porter by *Mr. Hudson*, of the *York Inn*, in or near to *Folkestone*, in *Kent*, where he remained for two years in entire ignorance of his past, until, his memory returning, he set off for *Winchelsea* on foot, and arrived to find his wife married to one *Eel*, a cobbler, whose life *Stephens* threatened if he did not restore him his *Nancy*. This the cobbler did, and so the matter ended. It occasioned much gossip, and to the end of his days *Mr. Stephens* (who settled down as a carpenter, having lost all relish for the sea), was regarded with curiosity, and had to the houses of the neighbouring gentry, whom his singular story never failed to divert."

There are on record many instances of

loss of memory, occasioned by various means. In some cases the deprivation has been complete, and the restoration sudden, and resembling an abrupt revelation. In other instances it has been accompanied by faint, glimmering, haunting reminiscences, creating indescribable anxiety, but growing up suddenly into a sound and permanent recovery.



*Crown Buildings, 188, Fleet Street,  
London, February, 1875*

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